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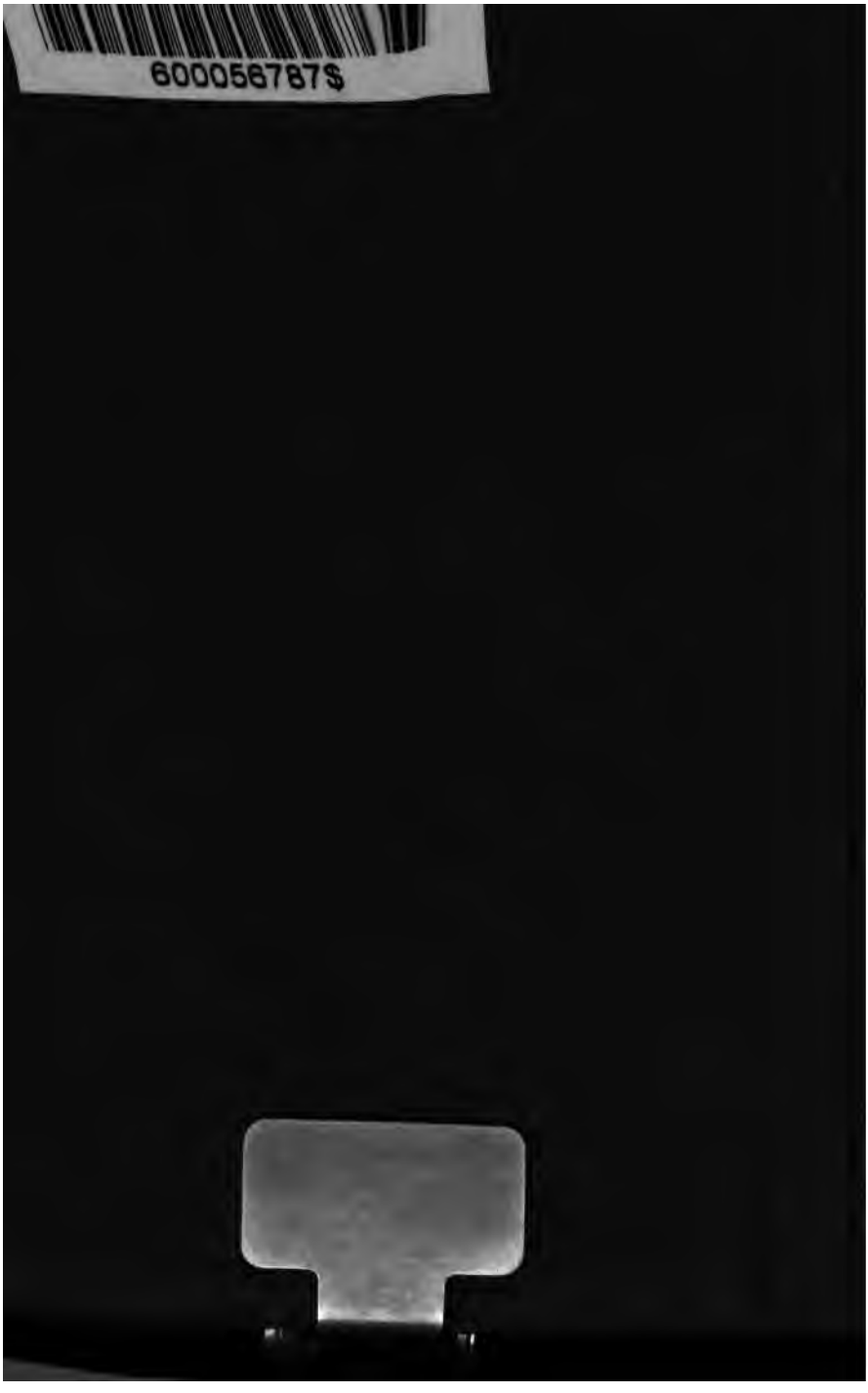
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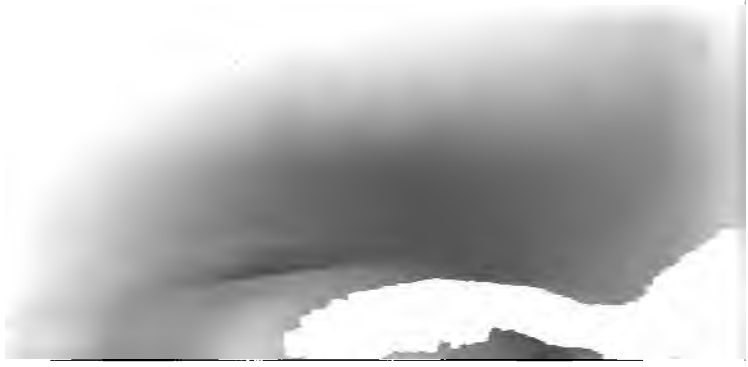


M E G.

VOL. I.

M E G.

BY

MRS. EILOART.

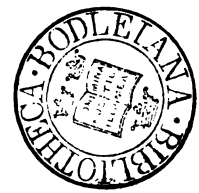
AUTHOR OF

"THE CURATE'S DISCIPLINE,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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To Edith,

IN HER HAPPY GIRLHOOD,

THIS

PICTURE OF A LIFE SO SADLY DIFFERENT,

IS INSCRIBED

BY

HER MOTHER.

MEG.

CHAPTER I.

MEG.

JOE was dying.

Joe was dying. His own mother said so, and so did Meg's. They came in and out, and the former did what she could for him; but times were hard, and her husband had been earning little lately, so it was not much help she could give Joe, though he had always been her favourite son, and excepting when the drink was on him—"and where's the man that isn't beside himself now and then?—as good a lad as ever breathed," as she would say. Still it was not much, except in the way of attendance,

and occasionally sitting up at night, she was able to do for her boy. She minded the baby, too, when its wailings disturbed its father, and so did what she could; but as to Meg's mother, who ever expected anything from her? Not Meg, certainly—not Meg, who a year before had thrown off her mother's control to pass under Joe's, and who now sat dry-eyed and silent, with her sleeping baby in her arms, watching him intently, and wondering if it *could* be true what the two old women had told her.

Joe to die! Joe—her Joe!—her dear, kind, brave, handsome Joe—Joe who had never given her a rough word, or struck her a blow, but when he had taken a little too much—Joe the father of her child, and —no, *not* her husband; but the wedding-ring and the priest's blessing were not considered indispensable in Swamp Town, where Meg and Joe were dwelling. They might

have lived together to the end of their days without feeling the necessity of either. Joe's mother and father were elderly folks, and well-to-do in their way, but they had always considered themselves sufficiently married without ever having entered a church or a registrar's office for the purpose; and why should Meg and Joe be more sensitive on such points than their elders? In truth, they had never thought of it; and had they done so, it is doubtful whether the elder ladies, Meg's mother as well as Joe's, would not have scouted the idea as a piece of needless extravagance, and advised the young couple to spend the money in a more sensible manner. Banns and the parson's fees! Why, Joe might buy himself a truck with the money that such superfluities would cost, or Meg be newly dressed from head to foot, in a style that would drive half her companions wild with envy. So Meg sat there looking at

Joe, with little thought that their union had been one that any would have a right to reproach either with—even her baby forgotten at the time, in the one great paramount thought that Joe was dying.

Dying! What did it mean?—what could it be? Was Joe—her Joe—to be taken from her, and put into a deep hole under ground; and was *that* to be the end of all? Was she never more to hear his voice, or listen for his footstep?—never more to see him come home tired and footsore, and sit down by the fire, and count his earnings, and tell her what fresh investment he meant to start in on the morrow? Was she never to stint and contrive, and pinch her own young appetite, that Joe might have plenty, and his supper be savoury and tempting? Joe to die—Joe to be cold and stiff—a white, stark, ugly thing like others she had seen? So cold, that to touch him would almost

freeze her blood!—she had placed her hand once on the dead child of a neighbour, and never forgotten the awful feeling—so deaf, that he would never hear her voice—so mute, that he would never speak her name—so still, that neither hand nor foot could move,—Joe, Joe—her Joe—to be all this, and nothing more?

Nothing more. The darkness of utter death was all around her—a thick, black, palpable darkness—and weighed her down with its dread horror. A world beyond for Joe and her to meet in? Another life for them to share together? She had not an idea of either one or the other,—this heathen, who had grown up in the midst of our civilization, and had heard neither of Christ nor of heaven,—of God, but in an oath or a curse.

It was a small, sparely furnished chamber where Joe was lying, the upper room in

one of the better houses in Swamp Town; for Joe had thriven very well in his trade as a costermonger, till he caught the cold which had ended in rheumatic fever; and Meg had a natural turn for housewifery, and a talent for making the best of their small means. There were a few attempts at adornment—a couple of small plaster figures, bought of an Italian image boy, but with a grace and beauty in their forms that showed some perception in the purchaser; two or three cheap coloured engravings that had been issued in various periodicals; and a small bunch of wallflowers on the mantel-piece, in a cheap but pretty vase, which Meg had picked up at a low price, on account of a chip in its brim.

The trestle bed on which Joe lay was covered with a patchwork quilt, Meg's handi-work. The pieces were gaudy and of irregu-lar form, and not too neatly sewn together.

Meg had almost had to teach herself the art of needlework; and her friends, who had contributed the pieces, liked bright colours in their attire, so she had had to make the best she could of the poor materials at her disposal; but even here there was some choice of colours displayed, and an eye to the general effect, which made this cotton patchwork quilt a different thing altogether from what it would have become under the hands of any other girl in Swamp Town. And under this quilt Joe lay breathing heavily, unconscious of the presence of the girl who sat there with her large eyes fixed on him. His pale wasted face looked the more ghastly yet from its contrast with the bright reds and blues of the quilt; and the dark matted hair, the hair which Meg had been so proud of, had lost its curl and glossiness, and lay a tangled mass upon the pillow. There were dark rings round his eyes,

and his clammy lips were half open. The fever had left him, but had destroyed him first. Not yet nineteen, though the father of Meg's child, life had begun and ended early with him, and Joe was now dying from sheer exhaustion.

His mother had not long left him—she had sat up the previous night, and been busy washing all the day, and after paying Joe a short visit, had gone back home, telling Meg she would be round early in the morning. It would not be over before then. So Meg kept her dreary watch alone—alone, but for the baby, whom Mrs. Blake had offered to take away with her; but she could not bear to part with it. The little one would be very quiet, and even if it were not, Joe was past hearing it. As to her own mother, she had been out all day selling matches, and telling servant-girls their fortunes, and having come home tired, and a

little the worse for a visit to the "Noah's Ark," had contented herself with looking in on Meg, and telling her that Joe was going; another twelve hours, and all would be over. And then she had gone to the little den, ten feet square, which she shared in company with a couple of other itinerant vendors.

So there Meg sat hushing her baby, and looking on Joe by the light of the long unsnuffed tallow candle, and wondering how it could be that Joe, *her* Joe, was to die. She was not yet seventeen, and beautiful with a beauty rarely seen in such places as Swamp Town. It was a face that would have been a fortune to a tragic actress—mobile, expressive, and finely formed, almost a perfect oval, with a finely-moulded chin, and a broad, open forehead; a forehead that a phrenologist would have delighted in, as an artist would in the large, dark wild eyes, the

arched eyebrows, the rich red lips, the clear dark skin, with the peach-like bloom upon the cheeks, and the wealth of dark hair that now fell around her in disorder. A face that might have suited either a martyr or a murderess, the face of one capable both of strong endurance and of passion, of loving recklessly and hating madly, of self-sacrifice even unto death, of resentment, or of gratitude that even death itself could not efface. But it was the last face that one would have thought Swamp Town could have produced.

The baby slept on, and Joe lay with no sign of life but his heavy breathing, and the thick, clammy sweat that now and again broke out on his forehead. After a time Meg laid the little one down in his cradle, and took her place close by Joe, wiping his forehead at intervals, or moistening his lips. It was all she could do, and it seemed so little —there was the sting of it. To sit there

helpless and powerless, and to know that the life she prized the most of all was ebbing away before her eyes.

Hour after hour passed on, and Meg still kept her watch. At last the cold grey light began to break, and Joe opened his eyes and fixed them on her; then he seemed to try and murmur something, and Meg bent down to catch the words—they were the last Joe ever spoke—"Good-bye, Meg—good-bye!"

So faint, so indistinct; and then the eyes fixed themselves in a stiff set glare, and the under-jaw dropped, and Meg shrieked in her despair, as she felt the hand she held in hers stiffen in her grasp. It was well that her cry aroused the baby, well for her that she had something else to do than sit and moan in her despair, well for her that the child's wailings could not be easily appeased, for at last the tears came pouring down like a

summer storm, and she found words in which to speak the anguish of her heart, and cry, "Oh! baby, father's gone!"

CHAPTER II.

SWAMP TOWN.

SWAMP TOWN. Have you ever been there, reader? It is situated in one of the northern suburbs of London, and within the present writer's recollection, the ground it occupies was a pleasant open green, through which a canal slowly wound its way. But the land was let out on short leases, and as no one cared to invest much in building property that would not be theirs for more than twenty-one years, one row of wretched, ill-built tenements was run up after the other—small four-roomed houses, mostly built of old materials, and letting the rain in through their wretched roofs, the wind

through their draughty, ill-hung doors and windows, and the wet ooze up from below the flooring, which had been laid almost flat on the soil beneath. As to roads through Swamp Town, they "grew," like Topsy; there were lines of mud and quagmire, that washed into the doorways of the dwellings on either side of them, which were called Prospect Row and Paradise Place; and in the summer the mud dried and pulverized into fine dust, through which pedestrians had to wade ankle deep, and horses sometimes sunk in almost to their knees. At the back of Swamp Town ran the canal, near the great dust heaps, which gave employment to so many of its inhabitants—nearly all who did not get their livelihood in this manner occupying themselves as costermongers, or hawkers of small articles. Drainage there was none in Swamp Town; and sometimes in summer

the stench and miasma were frightful, generating all kinds of fevers, and mercifully sweeping off the children in numbers.

At the time of which I speak, about a dozen years ago, there was neither church nor chapel, but there had at last been some talk of building the former; and meanwhile a clergyman had been engaged to officiate as Home Missionary amongst the pagans of Swamp Town. He was a good, well-meaning man enough, but whether or not he was fit for his work, there was little as yet to show for it; but indeed he had not been long in the field, and it was early days as yet to look for any result of his labours. There had come other workers, too, in the last few months. A band of ladies had been stirred by the wretchedness and squalor of the place to see what they could do for it, had started a soup-kitchen, organized a plan of house-to-house visiting, were trying

to establish sewing parties for the girls, and get them to join classes for instruction in reading.

The inhabitants of Swamp Town looked at first suspiciously upon both the clergyman and the ladies, but some of the latter were women not easily daunted, and they had the gifts so essential to those who visit amongst the poor—great patience, great hopefulness, and tact.

Meg had seen little of them. She had her baby to mind, and her small household affairs to see to, so she would not go with the other girls to the sewing and reading classes; and she had a dogged pride of her own, which, when Joe's illness came on, prevented her applying to the soup kitchen for relief. She had sold nearly all her own and Joe's wearing apparel to supply him with necessaries, and the furniture must have gone next, had not Joe been taken

away as he was—which was a mercy, her mother told her, for he might have gone "lingerin' on for weeks, till she had had to sell the very bed from under him." As it was, the parish had to perform the last poor duties for Joe. Meg followed him to the grave, carrying her baby; and then she went back to her home, which, her mother told her, she was going to share with her.

"For you'll be terrible lonely, Meg, girl, all by yourself, and perhaps it'll be best for us to take it turn and turn about to go out, or stop in and mind the baby. Or I don't know but what it'll be as well for you to go out altogether. Vi'lets is coming in, and you'll make a better hand at selling them than I shall—'specially with the gentlemen."

So Meg went out with her violets, and had, as her mother had expected, far better fortune with them than she would ever

have had herself. Gentlemen bought because the vendor was so fair to look upon, and ladies because they pitied the poor young thing out in the chill March air, who was so young, and looked so innocent. It was a great trouble to have to leave her baby, but her mother thought that the child might spoil her trade, especially with the ladies, giving Meg, as a reason, however, for not allowing her to take the child, the fact that it was delicate, and the keen winds would increase the cold under which it was labouring. So when Meg had disposed of her violets, she would hasten home to her baby, which she always found quiet, and generally asleep, and having nursed and fed it, would go out again to sell play-bills at the doors of the theatres; then, when the half-price visitors had gone in, and there was no chance of selling any more, go back again to her cheerless home, and sit by the

fire, with her baby on her lap, thinking of Joe, till her mother's querulous voice told her it was time to go to bed.

Poor Meg! it was a comfort to find the little one always "so good." In her ignorance she was not aware that the most violent crying, the most "fractious" temper that ever wore out a nurse's patience, would have been better than that over-quietness. The child had been born weak, with but little hold on life, but what it had had been pretty well dosed out of it by its grandmother. The old woman had always something "comforting" handy to give it whenever it opened its little mouth to utter a feeble cry, and the poor babe would fall asleep again, and give no further trouble for some hours to its grandmother.

"It saved a deal o' trouble," Mrs. Blount said, "and the child was better so than always pesterin' in arms."

Meg gave her all her earnings—they were few enough after all—her mother had completely regained the ascendancy she had had over her before she began housekeeping with Joe; or rather, since the great trouble had befallen her, the girl had been too tame and spiritless to oppose her own will to Mrs. Blount's. "And after all, if mother had her ways, she was good to baby, an' where was the good of troublin'?"

Where indeed? Where was the use of troubling about anything, now Joe was in his grave, and Meg's heart buried with him.

Mrs. Blount certainly had her ways—not altogether agreeable ones, and although some of them were too common to most of the dwellers in Swamp Town to cause much remark, others were of a more peculiar nature, and distinguished Mrs. Blount unpleasantly from her neighbours. She drank whenever she could get the wherewithal; but that was

not at all an uncommon thing for an elderly lady to do in Swamp Town, and Mrs. Blount was not quarrelsome in her cups, had never been known to pull a friend's hair, tear her cap, or call her rude names, let her have taken what amount of gin she might. But I think the other ladies in Swamp Town would have forgiven her if she had occasionally forgotten herself in this manner; for, after all, it was what they were accustomed to in one another, and they had no want of forbearance towards such occasional aberrations. But Mrs. Blount "gave herself airs" when she was not sober, and was a "stuck-up thing, without any call to be so," the ladies in Swamp Town said; for, after all, what had her first husband been but a convict, and as to Meg's father, if he'd been good for anything would he ever have left her to shift for the child and herself as he had done? But Mrs. Blount treated all their remarks,

when she heard them, with a disdainful silence. They came from "a low lot, and she never troubled herself to listen to sich." Swamp Town was good enough for Mrs. Blount sober; but Swamp Town, when she was otherwise, was regarded by her with supreme disdain. And, unhappily, to be sober was with Mrs. Blount the exception, not the rule—her normal condition, when at all in funds, being a sort of half-way stage between the two extremes of drunkenness and sobriety. She was apt to be rather sharp and querulous with Meg, and to look keenly after her, to see that she exerted herself to the utmost in selling playbills and hawking violets. Let the weather be what it might, out Meg must go, and she had a hard time of it when she came home if she had not disposed of her stock in trade. But Meg was used to hardships—she had begun life by selling water-cresses and matches, and she had become so accustomed to the streets,

they seemed more her home than her little room that Joe no longer shared. It had been such a happy time that one year with Joe —with Joe, who was a man, and worked for her and himself too, and kept her indoors out of the cold wind and pattering rain, that he was always ready himself to brave. Poor Joe! he had not been altogether perfect, apt to swear, and use coarse words; and when the drink was on him, he had sometimes struck her, as is the custom with men of his class. But what did that matter? If he could only have been living now to strike her as he pleased!

The spring ripened into summer, and Meg changed her violets for pinks and roses, and the sunshine, that even in great cities is a glad and blessed thing, found its way into the girl's darkened soul, and lightened it of some of its heaviness. She was so young, and it is not so easy for the young to be kill-

ed by grief as they imagine, and life was strong in her, so after a time Meg found herself able to laugh with her companions, and sometimes join in their coarse jokes.

Not always, though—they had never been much to her taste—the girls around sometimes said of her, "Meg was a lady, and took after her mother."

And on Sundays she went out with her baby, taking long walks with it, till they reached the green fields, where she would sit down to listen to the twitter of the birds, and look up to the blue sky, and think if only Joe had been there to enjoy it all with her. Only Joe! and he was still in his grave, down, down with the clods and the worms, where never voice of birds could reach, or sunshine cheer him more. And then Meg would cry in her despair, weeping the passionate rain of tears which save young hearts from breaking, and wish that she and baby,

too, were both with Joe; for what right had they to live and look on the flowers, and the light, and the fresh green earth, while Joe knew nothing of them?

CHAPTER III.

TAKEN AWAY.

SO the summer passed on. Meg heard her companions sometimes speak of the clergyman's visits to their homes, and she knew that he had been to her own once or twice when she was absent. Two or three of the ladies had called, but Meg saw nothing of them either, as she was so little at home till the evening. She would have been glad to have seen them, and wondered "what like they were, to come to folks in Swamp Town!" But her mother had not much to tell her of them.

"The parson was like all other parsons, and talked a lot of stuff that there was no

understanding; as to the ladies—well, they *were* ladies—she would say that of them; but folks were better at home, to her thinking, than prying and poking about other people's houses, where they were not wanted, and finding fault with everything they saw. Things was changed—once there was a time when she'd sat down with such, and drunk her tea out of silver and chaney, and no one would have thought of finding fault with her management of a baby then; but folks thought they might say what they liked, to such as weren't so well off as they had been."

Mrs. Blount, indeed, had been seriously offended by one of the visitors, a widow lady and a mother, who, mistrusting the baby's appearance and quietness, had questioned her so closely that she had at last elicited the nature of "baby's comfort," and the frequency of its administration. She

was so urgent in her appeals to Mrs. Blount to discontinue it, that that worthy matron had received the advice as a personal affront, and a slur upon her own good management of infancy, and hence was not inclined to look too favourably upon any future visits she might receive.

It would have been a good thing for Meg had she been at home on these occasions. These women had chosen a difficult work, and they were doing it well. They had an idea—some of them, at least—that the right way to reach the hearts and waken the minds of those lost in dense, stolid, brutalizing ignorance, was not by attempting to explain the highest and most intricate mysteries which the minds of a Newton or a Locke would fail to pierce—that it was of little use talking to men of saving faith before you had made them feel that they had souls for that faith to save; that it was of doubtful

utility to expect those who were worn out with privation, or soddened with drink, to comprehend the hard things of which Paul wrote, and which even Peter found it difficult to understand.

There were some of Meg's companions—girls of her own age—who could not have told you the name of the country they lived in, or the Queen who governed them; there were mothers, too, amongst these girls—mothers who had not formed the comparatively respectable connection Meg had with Joe, and which, possibly, had his life been trebled in length, might have endured as long—mothers with children that called no man father, and which they were as proud and fond of—for the instincts of motherhood were strong in many of them—as the happiest and most honoured wife could be of hers. Yes, they were mothers like the brutes, and with no more sense of wrong or

shame in being so. Lost? do you say. Why, like Meg, they were that from their birth! What chance had any girl growing up in Swamp Town, of learning what is pure and chaste, lovely, and of good report? The very shamelessness with which they would show a visitor their babies, was, in one sense, their most redeeming point. They had sinned in ignorance, and, after all, tiresome and wearying as the little ones might be, on the whole they were not ill-treated. Human nature is not all bad, even in Swamp Town, as I think the motherliness of these unwedded mothers might go some way to prove. So it was in these that the visitors of Swamp Town tried to awaken a sense of better things—of womanly ways, of neatness, cleanliness, and modesty—beginning with small things, in the hope of leading them on to better.

But, as I said, Meg was never in the way

when they called, and her mother was not one to profit much by such gentle ministrations. So the summer went on, and even Meg's eyes could not fail to perceive that the baby was growing weaker and punier every day, and at last she insisted on having her own way, and taking the child to a doctor who saw patients gratis every morning. He was a rising man, pushing his way fast into an extensive practice, and not disposed to waste much time or many amenities upon his poorer patients. He looked at the tiny creature, now nearly nine months old, and no heavier or larger than many a healthy babe of one, listened to its breathing, felt its little flickering pulse, asked its age, and then told Meg she would never rear it. It had water on the brain, and he suspected inflammation on the chest was fast setting in. Meg gave a great cry, and looked at him in wide-eyed horror. Was she to lose this too? Was

this—this to go as well? And she flung herself on her knees to the doctor, and asked him if he couldn't save her little one.

"I can't spare him!" she gasped; "Joe's gone, and I've nothing now but Willie! He mustn't die!—he can't die! Oh! doctor, folks say you can do such wonderful things, can't you—can't you save my little baby for me?"

Meg was getting troublesome, and the doctor was used to scenes of distress; but she must be got quietly out of the surgery. He asked her where she lived, told her he would come and see the child the next time he came that way, gave her a little medicine for it, and so got Meg out of the room, and turned his attention to another patient. On she went with her little burthen, walking like one in a dream, till a heavy shower of rain came on, and Meg had to look for shelter. There was none in the street—the

houses were all private, and not a single door had a portico. She took off her thin, old shawl, and wrapped it round the baby, but it was of little more protection than so much thin paper, and she ran on as fast as she could; but still she could not run fast enough to prevent herself and the little one being wet through.

This unlooked-for accident completed matters as far as the baby was concerned—the inflammation the doctor had spoken of set in in good earnest, and before three days were over, baby was stiller than ever, and Meg, with despairing, tearless eyes, looked on a little corpse. Never for her had the words sounded, "Suffer the little ones to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." Never for her. Baby and its father were gone away, and Meg knew of no hereafter.

CHAPTER IV.

NEW WORK FOR MEG.

IT was early spring, and violets were scarce this year, so Meg tried what wall-flowers would do for her. Baby had gone, and she had no longer Joe, but she must eat, and bread must be earned and bought, though the life it sustained was hardly worth the living. Her mother, too, required more care and better food than Meg could give her. The last winter had been a long and trying one to many in Swamp Town, and Mrs. Blount had well-nigh sunk under it. She now kept her bed constantly. The neighbours—Joe's mother especially—came in and out to see to her,

which was the more creditable to their good-nature, as Mrs. Blount was rather a trying invalid—not easily pleased, sadly given to grumbling, and apt to take offence at trifles. She could not so easily get drunk now, but her illness had the same effect upon her that her potations had had before, filling her mind with reminiscences of former state and splendour, "when she was waited on hand and foot, and hadn't so much as to lift her little finger to help herself." Her neighbours were very tolerant of her captiousness, however, bearing with her partly on Meg's account, and partly, too, because even Swamp Town had its own notions of duty, and thought it ought to help its neighbour now and then. The clergyman came to see her, and she received his visits with a bland condescension, that was rather edifying, under the circumstances; even exerting herself to get up a

few phrases that she had learned long ago at a Sunday-school she had attended for a few months, and which, though she had never rightly understood their meaning, she considered it would be civil and proper to use when addressing a clergyman. On the whole, her civility was very much to her credit, for, as she told her intimates—

"He's got his livin' to get, like the rest of us, and though it's a funny way of gettin' it, to go talkin' first to one, and then to the other, about a pack o' stuff that there's no gettin' to the bottom of, still, there's no harm in lettin' him talk on. It gives him a little encouragement. I'll go and hear him when that new church is built they talk of, if I get well enough, and can scrape the money together for a decent bonnet; but Meg's a poor hand at her business, or she'd get a deal more than she does. Ah! well, she wasn't born to it, that's one thing—to

think of a girl of mine getting her living by selling flowers in the street!"

Meg, perhaps, was *not* clever at her trade, or times were hard, and people had not much money to spare for flowers; but she found it a hard matter to provide enough for her own wants and her mother's, and was standing, weary and hopeless, at the close of a chilly day in March, thinking what a pleasant thing it must be to be sure of the next day's food every night, and wondering where hers was to come from, when she had only twopence-halfpenny to take home, and had left only half a loaf in the cupboard. It was so cold, that the people were fast hurrying home, glad to be out of the keen blast, and Meg's last chance of selling her flowers seemed failing, for no one appeared inclined to stop in the keen wind to buy them. Meg shivered, and drew her thin old shawl the closer, and was

about to walk on, to try if she could find a corner a little more sheltered from the wind, when her attention was attracted by a lady, short, and inclining to be stout, who was coming towards her with a brisk, decided step—the step of a woman who had very much to do, and who felt that her every movement was of some importance to herself and the world in general. She might be nearer forty than thirty, and could never have been handsome, even in her youth. It was a peculiar face—a dull, sallow complexion, a low, broad forehead, with the thick black hair growing so as to make it appear lower still; keen, small grey eyes, a broad, massive nose, and thin firm set lips. It was not the face of a woman likely to buy flowers, and Meg had little hopes of finding her a purchaser; still, she would try; and therefore, as the lady came

near, she held forward her best bunch with—

"Only a penny, lady—see, all these, and only a penny."

"Don't want them, girl," was the impatient reply. "Take care you don't get taken up for begging, if you annoy people like this."

The lady was about to pass on, when she caught sight of Meg's face. It had lost something of its first brilliance of colour since we first saw it, and had a thin, worn, weary look, which, however, gave something of refinement and pathos to its beauty. It was a strange face for a street girl to wear, and so the lady seemed to think. She looked at Meg critically and approvingly. It was a cold, fixed, steady look—not an atom of kindly feeling or interest in it. She was mentally appraising all Meg's

points, as a man might those of a horse he was asked to give an opinion on.

Meg shrunk from the look—she had never been so surveyed before. Gentlemen, and, indeed, men of all grades, had sometimes expressed their admiration of her in outspoken terms; and even ladies, when they bought her flowers, had let their eyes rest on her face, half wondering at its beauty; but such a glance as this Meg had never yet encountered. Apparently the lady was satisfied with the result, for instead of passing on, she stopped to question Meg in a hard, dry, business tone, as to her name, her parentage, and place of abode.

Meg answered civilly to all: perhaps the lady was a District Visitor, and would come and see her mother, in which case Meg felt very doubtful of the reception she would meet with; but, at any rate, if Meg were civil, she would most likely buy her flow-

ers when she had done questioning her.

"And how do you get your living?" the lady continued. "By idling in the streets, pestering people to buy what they don't want, and hindering their time to tell you so?"

"I sell play-bills sometimes," said Meg; "and I've tried oranges in the winter."

"Ah! all bad alike—only so many excuses for idleness. The police ought to be ashamed of themselves for allowing it. I think, if you're willing, I can find something better for you to do than standing about in the streets. Have you a mind to try?"

"Yes," said Meg doubtfully. She had no great faith in her questioner. "That's if I'm paid for what I'm set to do."

"Paid! of course you'll be paid. You don't suppose I want you to work for nothing? Come to my home to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock—it's number thirty in this

street. You won't forget? Wash your face, mind, and give your hair a good brushing. How long is it, by-the-bye?"

How long! Whatever could the lady want to know the length of Meg's hair for? Surely she never dealt in such a commodity? The girl started and coloured, and then stammered out,

"Please, ma'am, times is hard, and I never makes much by my flowers; but—but I shouldn't like to sell it."

Tho lady laughed a hard, harsh laugh.

"I'm no wig-maker," she said; "and you may make much more by keeping your hair on your head than by cutting it off. But I hope it's a good length. Now mind you come to my house to-morrow. Don't disappoint me; I shall set you to work at once that will be very easy indeed for you to do, and pay you for it each day as soon as it's done."

She glanced once more at Meg's toilet—not a disapproving look, though Meg herself felt ashamed of her rags and wretchedness.

"Please, ma'am, I know my clothes is bad, and the best are all in pawn. Things has been so bad this winter," said Meg, apologetically; "but I could borrow Sally Smith's new gown, an' Jane Brett's got a tidyish bonnet and shawl, I thinks she'd lend me, so as I could come decent to your place."

"Don't put them on, on any account," cried the lady sharply. "You'll do much better just as you are—basket and all, remember; and if you've got an older gown, with more patches in it, I think I should like it better. Only wash your face,—yes, we must have that done," she added, glancing again critically at Meg, "on account of the lights and shades—dirt, too, would inter-

fere with the colouring. No, she must come clean."

Then telling Meg her number again, and charging her to be punctual, the lady crossed the street, and went in at number thirty; and Meg, thinking it useless to stop out in the cold any longer, walked towards home, speculating as she went what possible work she could be set to do in which it would be an advantage to have long hair, and a gown, if possible, more patched than that she had on.

CHAPTER V.

A VOTARY OF HIGH ART.

NO. 30, Courtmain Street, was inhabited by a widow lady, Mrs. Mayne, the very same who had startled Meg with so many questions, and by her strange odd way of putting them. Mrs. Mayne was peculiar, and her peculiarity being apt to take a brusque and unpleasant form, she was not so popular as she might have been. From a girl she had had a strong liking for art, which her parents had allowed to be cultivated at the expense, perhaps, of other things.

Whether they were to blame or not, she grew up a clever but not very agreeable per-

son, with great faith in her own powers, a great reverence for her art, and very little faith or reverence for anything in the world besides. Perhaps her training had not been the best in the world, in other ways than that of being suffered to cultivate her powers as a painter too exclusively. Her father, in his day, had been a famous lecturer, both on political and religious subjects, had written for a well-known paper of very democratic tendencies, and in his way had made himself a man of some note and importance. But his ideas were liberal on other subjects than politics or religion, and his wife thought unduly so. She was a handsome woman, and very clever, much too clever for the wife of a genius, and much too spirited to submit tamely to seeing the genius lavish on another the attentions which, as a wife, she considered were her due alone. Consequently there was not much peace in the household

in which Mrs. Mayne's girlhood was spent; it was not a home in which a girl was likely to grow up into either a very happy or a very good woman. All the chief subjects of the day were discussed—very often by some of its leading minds—in her hearing; and before she was fifteen, Rosa Baring had her own set of opinions upon every subject that she thought worth troubling herself about; opinions that she considered herself quite competent to maintain against any and every one, her father and mother not excepted, who might venture to dispute them. Religion, morals, social courtesy—Miss Baring could have taught the world upon these matters, if need be, but had nothing to learn from it.

On the whole, it was perhaps not a bad thing that she had given herself up to art—there is no knowing else into what aberrations her self-will and scorn of all conven-

tionalities might have led her; and, considering all things, she was not a bad daughter. There was one thing to be said, if she respected anything, it was talent—artistic talent first, and after that, talent of any kind whatever. And certainly her father and mother were very clever people—the mere fact of their being her father and mother did not at all influence her in acknowledging them to be so. She was not at all disposed to give a superstitious reverence to the fifth commandment. But she was quite aware of her father's position, and the influence he held; of her mother's skill and shrewdness in the ordinary affairs of life, and of the grace and conversational powers which made her—on public days, at least—so charming a mistress of the house. She thought it a great pity papa would talk nonsense to other people when it annoyed mamma—he meant no harm—at least, she believed he did not;

and it was very foolish of mamma to worry herself about such trifles. After all, why couldn't she shut her eyes to anything papa did not want her to see—it was so much more sensible to take things quietly. Still, she bore very well with the parental failings, and, on the whole, was as dutiful as many a more decorous young lady, and pursued her artistic career undisturbed by the household storms that rose ever and anon, when papa's aberrations had been too glaring, or mamma had shown her resentment a little too fiercely.

At thirty-two she had an offer—her very first; and after due consideration she accepted it, her father giving his consent, which was perfectly needless, as Rosa would have married just as complacently without it; but giving nothing else. Indeed, he would have found it difficult to do so, good as the income was which he derived from

his lectureships and his weekly contributions to the *Pepperer*, the style in which he thought it right to live swallowing it all up. But there was the connection—as Mrs. Baring said, in her most dignified manner—there was the connection—what could any man want more than the distinction of being son-in-law to Mr. Baring? In her way, she respected her husband too, in spite of his many sins against herself. He was something to be proud of, and I doubt if she was not happier as his neglected, almost insulted wife, than if she had been the idolized darling of some obscure, plodding individual, content simply to practise the common-place duties of husband and father, leaving it to others to declaim upon the sins of the upper classes, and the God-like natures of the lower.

At the end of three years' marriage, Rosa Baring, now Mrs. Mayne, was a widow.

The wonder was, people said, that poor Mayne, who had always been delicate, had not been killed off long before. He had been a sculptor, consequently her marriage had thrown Mrs. Mayne more than ever amongst art and artists; and at his death she vowed never to be fettered by matrimonial ties again, but to devote herself to her favourite pursuit. Poor Mayne had not ranked very high in his profession, and his wife and mother-in-law had been in the habit of looking down upon him—compared with the famous lecturer and politician, he seemed a very small, common-place person indeed. But he had done his best for his wife, insured his life for some thousands, and left the insurance, with the lease of the house they had lived in, his different works, and the entire residue of his property, to her, unshackled by any restriction. So Mrs. Mayne found herself in comfortable circum-

stances, and had reason to congratulate herself on having married, when, six months after, her father died, leaving her nothing, and his wife the furniture of his house, and just fifty pounds owing to him by the *Pepperer*.

Mr. Mayne had been a model husband to a plain wife, had believed in her implicitly, and provided for her liberally. Mr. Baring for years had neglected his, although a still handsome and attractive woman, and out of an ample income had not attempted to make the slightest provision for her. Mr. Mayne and his wife had never had a quarrel the whole time of their marriage. How could they, when he gave her her way in everything? Mr. Baring's home had been a scene of continual dissension, recrimination, and reproach—the latter, generally speaking, very well deserved by him. But, of the two, he was by far the most regretted.

Now he was gone, in Mrs. Baring's eyes his faults and infidelities were swallowed up in the lustre of his fame. She was a selfish woman, too, and keenly alive to the loss of comfort and position entailed by her husband's death; but she never reproached his memory, and was very tenacious of others doing so. There was some talk of erecting a monument in Kensal Green, by public subscription, to the late Mr. Baring, and a sympathizing friend, moved by compassion for his widow's destitute condition, observed—

"It would be far better, Mrs. Baring, to get up a subscription for you."

"They might do that as well," said she.

It seemed purely a matter of course to her that Mr. Baring's memory should be honoured, and his widow provided for by a grateful public, to whose service he had devoted his talents in his lifetime. However,

the monument was not erected, and no one started a subscription in behalf of Mrs. Baring, who sold off her furniture, and went to reside in a small private boarding-house near her daughter. It would have seemed more natural that the two should have lived together, but Mrs. Mayne had no wish to have too much of her mother's society, and preferred allowing her a small yearly sum, which, with an annuity purchased by the proceeds of the late Mr. Baring's effects, was sufficient to maintain her in comfort at the boarding-house.

"We're best apart, mamma and I," Mrs. Mayne said, candidly. "She'd be sure to lecture me, now she hasn't poor papa to keep in order. But we shall be very good friends indeed, as long as we don't see too much of one another."

Mrs. Mayne was now devoting her energies to her favourite pursuit. She had her

own ideas on the subject, and was anxious to indoctrinate the rising (feminine) generation with them. So she opened a school for female pupils, where the art taught was very high indeed, and the young ladies (though Mrs. Mayne would have scorned to have called them anything but students) were expected to ignore the little pruderies and conventionalities of their sex, and give themselves up to their profession, quite unshackled by the old-world trammels, which might have proved hindrances to their career.

Mrs. Mayne was very outspoken indeed on this matter—so outspoken that some of the parents of the students removed them from her tuition, not being sufficiently advanced in artistic feeling to enter into her views of the subject. Mrs. Mayne ridiculed them as purists, and went on with her teachings to the few that remained; and it was

for the benefit of these that she wished to secure Meg's services as a model.

Twelve o'clock came, and with it Meg. She had been waiting outside the door, in fact, for the last five minutes, listening for the church clock in the adjacent square to strike the hour before she knocked. Then she gave one timid rap, which was answered by a maid-servant, who, having been told to expect Meg, was not surprised at her appearance, but ushered her at once into the studio, where Mrs. Mayne and the pupils were awaiting her.

It was a large room at the back of the house, lit by a skylight, and round it were different casts and busts for the girls to copy—the Farnese Hercules, the Apollo Belvedere, the Dying Gladiator. Mrs. Mayne liked her girls to study the human form divine, as exemplified in the male subject; and as some of them shrunk from doing so

when that subject happened to be in flesh and blood, why, she made a sacrifice of her principles to their weakness, and allowed them to draw from the cast.

It was a pitiful concession—she almost despised herself for making it; but yet, while the feminine mind was still so trammelled by old-world prejudices, as to refuse to look at a model merely in an artistic point of view, she was obliged to humour it a little—otherwise her pupils might have failed her altogether; and though this would not have troubled her in a pecuniary point of view, still she liked the little excitement of teaching, and had great hopes that in the course of a few years she might see around her a band of female painters with ideas as artistic and unfettered as her own.

Several paintings by Mrs. Mayne, in different stages of ugliness, were on the walls. Of course she belonged to the intensely Pre-

Raphaelite School, and it was almost a wonder that Meg's beauty had not repelled, instead of attracting her. But the girls had been grumbling lately, the last old man had been so insufferably hideous, and smelt so terribly of tobacco, and the younger model was an impertinent fellow, who had winked, actually winked at them, when Mrs. Mayne was expatiating on the development of his biceps, and the massive amplitude of his chest.

They wanted a change, they said, and something more attractive to study than muscles and sinews; and Mrs. Mayne had resolved to humour them for a time, and look out for a child who could be taught to sit still by the hour together. She had her eye already on one little unfortunate, the daughter of her washerwoman, when it so happened that she encountered Meg, who appeared just what she required.

Meg looked around her timidly. Mrs.

Mayne was in the midst of her pupils, who were gathered round her easel, whereon was a picture, "Boadicea," nearly completed. Boadicea was fearfully ugly; the model had been a plain woman, but Mrs. Mayne had intensified her plainness. Boadicea was stalking through a forest, where every leaf was depictured with startling accuracy, and the undergrowth of brambles worked out with a minuteness that made you feel, the girls said, as if the thorns were running into you. It was not a pleasing picture, Boadicea being so hideous, and the forest such a tangle of briers; and the green leaves of the trees, and the yellow hair and blue robes of the British queen, were painted in such glowing colours, that you could only suppose that the ancient Britons must have used very wonderful dyes, and Nature, in their time, dealt in pigments which she had long since laid aside.

Mrs. Mayne was giving her pupils a lecture

on colouring, illustrated by this picture. She was looking, if anything, plainer and harder than the day before. Her hair (there was not too much of it, and the texture was coarse and harsh) was drawn off her forehead, and rolled up in a knot behind, with the obvious intention of being as much out of the way as possible. She had on a brown Holland wrapper or blouse, not too clean, and stained with many colours. Collar and cuffs she had none; of crinoline, too, she was innocent; in fact, she despised it, as unworthy an artist, and her hands, like her dress, bore traces of her favourite employment. There were half a dozen girls around her, one or two with bright, pleasant faces, and they all turned and looked curiously at Meg, as she stood before them, wondering and wide-eyed.

Mrs. Mayne surveyed her from top to toe, then nodded approval.

"You'll do, young woman. Now, the question is, can you stand still?"

"Yes, ma'am, I think so," said Meg; "while you're getting the work ready for me, did you mean?"

"Pooh! child; the work *is* to stand still. I want you to keep quiet, while these young ladies draw from you. I shall pay you one-and-sixpence an hour, and if you keep still enough for the purpose, I dare say we shall employ you for some time. Now, take off your shawl and bonnet, let down your hair, and I'll place you in position."

Meg did as directed, wondering more than ever at the idea of being paid for people to look at her face and copy it. Mrs. Mayne made her place herself in different attitudes—first standing, next kneeling, and then sitting with the basket before her. That, at last, was pronounced to be the best position, and the young ladies placed themselves around

her, one drawing her full face, two in profile, and the rest getting as much of her as circumstances permitted.

Meg was very quiet, and had she been a lay figure in Mrs. Mayne's hands, could not have submitted more passively to have her head turned first on one side, then the other, her arms raised or lowered, and her shoulders bent forward or drawn back; and, indeed, had she been a lay figure, Mrs. Mayne could not have handled her more coolly, or spoken of her with less regard to the effect her words might have upon the object they described; but as many of her expressions were technical, Meg did not understand their meaning, and when all the young ladies had arranged themselves, remained as still as any model need to be.

She was occupied with her own thoughts. Was this, then, the way that people made pictures? And was she, Meg, to be put

into one, or, indeed, into half a dozen? Half a dozen likenesses of herself; and would these be placed in the shop-windows for people to stand and stare at, or pay money for to have them as their own! What would Joe have said if he had lived to know of it? Poor Joe! how he would have liked to have had one hanging up in their room! And then, chasing away these thoughts, came the little vain flutterings that come even to the girls of Swamp Town—Should she make a pretty picture? Would people be as pleased with it as she had been with some she remembered? And, oh, dear! why had the lady told her to come in that old dress? Sally Smith would have lent her her Sunday gown directly, especially if she had known what it was wanted for. Would they put in every patch in the one she had on?—and why did the short stout lady make her pull her hair all down? She

had plaited it up so nicely that morning. What a pity it was to make her undo it all, and have it hanging in that untidy manner about her shoulders.

For two hours Meg sat motionless; and then Mrs. Mayne, who had been flitting from one pupil to another, advising and directing the whole time, declared that it was time to give over. Meg was sketched in, and she must come the next day to have the wash laid on.

Meg felt more puzzled than ever when she heard her, but that day had been such a day of marvels, that she took the mystery of her washing as one more. Mrs. Mayne gave her three shillings, told her to put on her bonnet and shawl, and come again at twelve o'clock the next day.

Still Meg lingered; she felt a great wish to see one of the pictures of herself, but shrunk from saying so. One of the girls, a

bright-eyed little creature, with a pleasant, good-humoured face, seemed to guess her wishes, saying,

"Would you like to see what I have made of you?" and pointed to her easel as a sign that she might come and look.

Meg advanced towards it. Was *that* her? It was but an outline, but it was an outline by Mrs. Mayne's best pupil, who bid fair to outstrip her instructress; and, delighting as much in beautiful things as Mrs. Mayne in ugly ones, she had worked with all her heart at Meg's face, and had already shadowed forth its beauty, and the pathos and the sorrow underlying it. Meg looked, and looked again. Was this face hers?—and if so, why, she would make as good a picture as any in the shops, and folks would be ready enough to stare at her. No! she did well enough without Sally Smith's Sunday gown, if she could look like that in her own

old one, with all its patches. Oh! if Joe could only have seen her thus!—would not he have been proud and pleased? And with the thought the big tears came welling in her eyes; and the young student, Mary Norton, looking kindly at her, said,

"Is there anything in it that vexes you?"

Meg gulped her sobs down with a great effort.

"No—no; but I was thinking if Joe could but have seen it, miss;" and then, dashing her tears away, left the room hastily.

Mary Norton looked after her pityingly.

"Poor girl! Joe must be dead, by the the way she speaks. I suppose he was her brother!"

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. MAYNE'S STUDIO.

MEG was punctual the next morning. Her mother had been very well satisfied with the money she had brought home, and the manner in which she had earned it.

"It was more respectable altogether than selling flowers in the streets—a thing she had never thought a girl of hers would come to. And, no doubt, if she pleased the lady —who certainly was a lady, by the way she paid Meg—she would find other work for her to do. More folks might be glad to copy Meg's face, and pay her for letting them do it. If Meg minded what she was

about, she would get her living like a lady, and keep her poor mother like one too!"

Meg thought little of the rise in the social scale which was likely to accrue to her by standing to be painted from. The money had been very acceptable—she had had a better supper and breakfast through it than she had known for a considerable time; but even that was less regarded by her than the work for which she received it. "To help make pictures!" It seemed to Meg almost too grand a thing to be real. For there was no doubt, if she stood quite still, and let the young ladies paint from her face, she did help, and people would look at the picture, and wonder who it was, or if there had ever been a girl that looked just like that. Meg thought that next to painting pictures was the glory of being painted in them, and took more pains than ever with her hair that morning, thinking that if the stout lady were

to notice how well it looked, she might have her put in the next picture with all those wonderful plaits round her head.

Mrs. Mayne placed Meg in the same attitude that she had stood in the previous day; then the young ladies arranged themselves around, and the work went on. They were delighted with their model. As they painted, the sense of all that perfect harmony in form and colouring, embodied in Meg's face, grew on them more and more, and she was so still, and submitted so meekly to all Mrs. Mayne's manipulations, and seemed so simply unconscious of her own great beauty, that they painted with a vigour and perseverance that was quite unusual with them. An hour had gone on, when the door of the studio opened, and an elderly lady, well and carefully dressed, came in.

"Sit down, mamma, and keep quiet," said Mrs. Mayne. "Out of the model's sight,

please; I don't want the expression altered through the eyes turning on you."

Mrs. Baring sat down where she could have a good side view of Meg, without the girl's seeing her, unless she turned her head round for the purpose; and taking up her glass, surveyed her through it. She was a handsome woman yet, though turned sixty. Her complexion was still clear and fresh, though its tones had faded, harmonising admirably with the grey hair which was braided round her face. The features were of a decided tone, but not enough so to be pronounced masculine; and if a close observer might have detected something in the keen grey eye, and set, firm mouth, to warrant him in pronouncing that, if the late Mr. Baring had sinned much in his married life, he had suffered a little, still their general effect was sufficiently attractive. She was taller than her daughter, and with just that

amount of *embonpoint*, which is pleasant and becoming in an elderly lady. Her movements, too, unlike Mrs. Mayne's brisk jerkiness, were dignified and graceful, and her dress always well-chosen and well put on. Mother and daughter, indeed, were a great contrast in most things. Mrs. Baring always making the best of her beauty, as, indeed, she did of every good thing that came in her way; while Mrs. Mayne seemed only to study how to intensify her plainness to the utmost. But the unlikeness, after all, was mostly on the surface—underneath, mother and daughter were more akin than most peeple imagined.

The painting went vigorously on, till Mrs. Mayne pronounced it time to give over. Then she left the room with her mother, and the girls, before going on with their other labours, gathered round the studio fire to partake of lunch.

It had been very cold all day, and now thick flakes of snow were falling fast. Meg shivered as she looked wistfully up to the sky-light, and thought of her thin shawl. It might leave off soon—perhaps the ladies would not be angry if she stayed a little. She put on her bonnet, ready to go, and then stood, shy and irresolute, looking at the casts and pictures round her. The girls, meanwhile, were too busy to pay any attention to her. This was their hour of relaxation—they were all a little in awe of Mrs. Mayne, and still more in awe of her mother, who often came into the studio; but luncheon-time was their own, and they liked to make the most of it. Their hands were cold, and they held them over the fire; then some produced chestnuts to roast, others apples; while Mary Norton, who was a girl of a daring mind, cried, "Let's chum together and have some coffee!"

Coffee!—that would be good, if Sarah would only be gracious enough to let them have it; but Sarah, Mrs. Mayne's housekeeper and cook, was not always gracious. Still, she had at times been prevailed on to sell them some coffee and sugar, and even lend them a tin pot to boil it in; and Mary Norton, as the boldest spirit of the party, was deputed to try if Sarah would do so to-day. Down she ran into the kitchen, while the others remained behind to speculate on her probable success; and presently returned, beaming with victory, and carrying a tray, on which was the coffee-pot and some cups and saucers. Lizzy Brown, who was considered the most experienced in domestic matters, was entrusted with the making, which was a very serious operation, and in which they all assisted, either by giving advice or by watching the boiling of the pot. At last the coffee was pronounced ready, and

Lizzy poured it out, each girl tendering her cup in turn, as there was no table sufficiently near the fire to place it on. Mary Norton was the first to pronounce an opinion upon it, which she did with a sigh of gratification.

"It's delicious! Lizzy, I never did taste such coffee as you make. Won't the pot stand another boiling?"

Lizzy was doubtful. The coffee, indeed, was poor enough already, with a strong taste of chicory, and not the slightest pretensions to clearness. Sarah had not been able to furnish any milk, so the girls took an extra allowance of sugar, and sipped their coffee with the air of connoisseurs endorsing Mary Norton's opinion of its merits. It was hot and sweet, at any rate, and there was the fun of making it, and the pleasure of drinking it in a very uncomfortable position, and of doing what they would be sure to get a lecture for, if Mrs. Mayne or her

mother came in. They laughed and chatted over it, making their little jokes, and now and then using a slang expression, if the truth must be told. But the slang was very mild, and the jokes very innocent. Meg heard them with a strange wonder. These girls, the youngest of whom she felt sure must be older than herself, seemed so free from care, and their merriment so different from any she had ever heard. She felt conscious, as she listened, of a great gulf between herself and them. It was not her wretched dress and their neat habiliments; not the sordid home she was to return to, and their pleasant dwellings; not even her own ignorance and their culture—the difference was deeper and broader than any of these causes would account for. Could it be the sorrow which lay in her own past? The loss of Joe and baby? Had these girls never known what trouble was, that their

laughter sounded so unlike her own and her companions'? Perhaps it was so; rich folks—and these must be rich, or they could never spend their time in painting pictures—couldn't have things go wrong with them as the poor did. They had money to pay doctors and nurses, and buy all that was wanted when those they loved were ill. They need never let them die before their time, as Joe and baby had done. No, it must be the trouble that made the difference between these ladies and herself.

Had Meg known it, the "ladies" had their troubles too. Most of them were studying painting, not as an accomplishment, but a profession, and the expense of acquiring it told heavily at times. Clothes would wear out so in going to and from the school at Kensington, or Mrs. Mayne's studio, and the money seemed going, going, with so little prospect of return. Their parents were not

rich, and the girls would have been very glad to have been earning something to lighten their outlay; and Clara Buckley's father was in failing health, and Clara knew that her mother was looking tremblingly forward to the day when the bread-winner would be taken, and wondering how long it would be before all the money spent on Clara would enable her at least to provide for herself. And Lizzy Brown had a widowed mother, who was denying herself accustomed luxuries, so that Lizzy might have the lessons she required. Even Mary Norton had her own little troubles, which we need not touch upon here, though, as Meg looked on her, she felt inclined to wonder if, in all her life, the young lady's eyes had ever shed a tear. And her own had known such burning ones!

Mary Norton was Mrs. Mayne's favourite pupil and convert. She had hitherto de-

voted herself to flower and still-life painting, which Mrs. Mayne contemptuously denominated "inane prettinesses." But Mary had painted them very well, and was just beginning to earn a few guineas now and then, when, unluckily, Mrs. Mayne came in her way, and persuaded her to give up her flowers, and devote herself to high art. Mary was possessed with the ambition of being an artist, and when Mrs. Mayne assured her that the study of the figure after pre-Raphaelite fashion could alone qualify her for the position, Mary was foolish enough to believe her, and look scornfully on the velvety mosses, the many-tinted leaves, and dainty blossoms on which she had hitherto wasted her time. But Mary was not of the stuff of which pre-Raphaelites are made; she thought the old man (Mrs. Mayne's favourite model) hideous, and the young one insufferably impertinent, and

Boadicea a fright; and was beginning to think in earnest of returning to her water-colours, and painting primroses and violets again, when Mrs. Mayne brought Meg before her as a model.

She was now about twenty-two, slight, short, dark, pale, and piquante, with good teeth, that she showed whenever she laughed (and that was very frequently), bright eyes, and a wealth of dark hair, coiled in plaits at the back of her small, well-set head. Not a pretty girl exactly, but with a face full of attraction of its own, and a truthful, loveable, warm-hearted girl, with a great deal of the child still about her, for all the two-and-twenty summers that had passed over her, and for all the undoubted talent and artistic feeling that, in her own small way, she possessed—a girl who could certainly never paint Boadicea, but whose spring flowers gave you a breath of the

country and its sweet air, and made you ask where you had seen just such a bank as that where these were growing, and whose grapes and apples made you long to have them for dessert.

"Which is no wonder," Mary once said, when told so. "That's just how I felt all the time I was painting them—that Nonpareil pippin, in particular; you don't know what a trial it was to keep my teeth out of that!"

Mary was now drinking her coffee, and eating roast chestnuts and sandwiches, when, looking up, she saw Meg still standing in the corner.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "That poor girl's not gone yet! And how cold she looks! I wonder if she'd like some coffee?"

She crossed the room, and went towards Meg with her cup in her hand.

"Will you have some? You must be

tired and faint with waiting so long—I am so sorry we didn't see you here before."

"No, thank you, miss, I'm not thirsty. I was only waiting a bit to see if the weather would clear up." Meg would have liked the coffee, too, but she saw that it was the young lady's own cup that she had offered her, "And if I take any she'll go without," thought Meg; "for she'll never drink after me. But," she continued, "would you mind, miss, telling me who this is meant for? It's someone's head, isn't it?"

"That—it's the bust of Bailey's Eve," replied Miss Norton. "It's very beautiful, isn't it?"

She might have added that it was at her entreaties Mrs. Mayne had placed it in the studio.

"Bailey's Eve?" repeated Meg, looking at the bust as if she could drink in its loveliness. "Well, she's wonderful pretty—but

who was Bailey, miss, and who was Eve?"

Miss Norton looked at her.

Where did this girl come from, who had never heard of Eve? But she could hardly have understood her aright, so she said,

"Bailey is the name of the sculptor, and this is Eve of the Bible. Of course you have read about her there?"

Meg looked no wiser. After a little consideration, however, she said,

"I think I've heard tell of the Bible, too. They say the parson as goes about our part, wants them all to read it. But there's a very few as can read our way—I can't—though mother could once, she says, but she's pretty nigh forgot it all now."

Mary Norton's path had never brought her in contact with ignorance like this before, and she looked with eyes half full of horrified surprise, half of a tender human pity, for the darkened soul before her. The dark-

ened soul! It was there, Mary's own told her so, looking out of those beautiful soft eyes that had dwelt with such delight upon the bust before her. A girl could look like *that* on Bailey's Eve, and yet know nothing of the Scripture story! Were there not Sunday schools and churches, and clergymen and district visitors, and had none of these come across this poor pagan? Mary felt troubled and unhappy, as if there must be guilt at some one's door, when Meg was so benighted.

Both the girls were startled by Mrs. Mayne's voice in the hall, and Mary ran to the others to assist in hiding the cups and coffee-pot behind the screen, in a place where Sarah had been told to look for them when they had gone.

Meg, seeing that the snow was no longer falling as fast as it had been doing, and fearing, too, that Mrs. Mayne would find

fault with her for staying, left the studio, and in the hall encountered that lady and her mother. Mrs. Baring looked curiously at her, then said sharply—so sharply, that she put Meg very much in mind of her daughter,

"What on earth do you mean by going out that figure, child? You surely never walk through the streets in the dress you wear as a model?"

Meg started and coloured, then said timidly,

"Please, ma'am, I ain't got no other—leastways they're all in pledge. I would have borrowed Sally Smith's Sunday gown, but the lady here said I wasn't to."

"Good gracious, Rosa, you don't mean to say you've picked up a girl out of the streets?" cried Mrs. Baring.

"What on earth does it matter, mamma, where I picked her up, as long as she makes a good model?" cried Mrs. Mayne, im-

patiently. "There, get along, child, you ought to have gone an hour ago. Come at twelve to-morrow, and be sure you wear the very same clothes. I wouldn't have a patch the less on any account!"

Mrs. Mayne walked into the dining-room, leaving her mother to follow, and that lady, having done so, seated herself by the fire, and began discussing the hot luncheon which Sarah, after some delay, had sent up. It was always hot luncheon when Mrs. Baring came—she had a decided disapproval of cold meat; and Sarah, who had an equal disapproval of the trouble involved in the preparation of anything else, was not apt to hurry herself about it.

"Whatever made you bring such a creature as that in the house, Rosa?" cried Mrs. Baring, as soon as she had sipped her first glass of sherry.

"Because she's just what I wanted for the

girls," said Mrs. Mayne. "Bright tones, good expression, capital outlines, and a wonderful depth of light and shade. When I've done with her, I shall recommend her to Jefferies. She's just in his line. He'll take her as King Cophetua's beggar-maid, or something of that kind."

"What do you know about her?—where does she come from?" said Mrs. Baring, helping herself to another glass of sherry. "She'll steal your spoons if you don't mind."

"No, she won't, for I don't mean to give her the chance. But she lives in Swamp Town, if you're curious in the matter."

"Swamp Town! The very place Maggy Powitt has been trying to civilize. Work in which I tell her she will never succeed. She would have had a better chance amongst the Hottentots, and you might as well have had one in your house as this girl!"

"No, I might not, mamma. It wouldn't

have been half such a good subject. Fancy the girls painting a Hottentot!"

"Don't be absurd, Rosa. What do you know of her character?"

"Nothing—I should doubt if she's got one! Whoever heard of a girl in Swamp Town having such an article? It's her face and figure that are my affair, not her moral qualities or respectability."

"You're incorrigible, Rosa! As likely as not she has a baby!"

"Shouldn't wonder, now you mention it. I'll ask her to-morrow. The girls in Swamp Town generally *do* have babies. If it takes after its mother, it may prove very useful. Harley deals in babies. He might be glad to have her and the child together. She would do famously for a gipsy mother, or a cottage housewife."

"But you mustn't recommend her to Harley, or Jefferies either. She may have

the baby, but it by no means follows that she has a husband."

"She's much better without one. He'd take all her earnings to get drunk on, and leave her nothing for herself."

Mrs. Baring's attempt to impress her daughter with some idea of the conventionalities of life were interrupted by the entrance of the housemaid, who informed her mistress that Mr. Jessop had called, and was waiting in the drawing-room.

"Mr. Jessop!" cried Mrs. Mayne; "he's safe to keep prosing for an hour. Do go in the studio, mother, and make yourself useful by keeping those girls to their work. They can do very well without me for a time, if you'll look after them. Take away lunch," she added to the servant, "and show Mr. Jessop in here."

Mr. Jessop was an old friend of Mr. Mayne's, and had been left executor of his

will. He was a staid, precise man, of about fifty, who discharged his duties in the management of Mrs. Mayne's affairs, most conscientiously, as a duty he owed to his departed friend. The lady's own proceedings were a source of serious uneasiness to him, she was so completely opposed to all his ideas of what a lady should be; and it was the standing wonder of his life that his late friend Mayne should ever have married her. But let her be as eccentric and erratic as she might, still she was the widow of that friend, and as such it behoved him to protect her, if need be, even against herself. And it was with a view to rendering this protection that Mr. Jessop had called this morning.

Some time since Mrs. Mayne had thought proper to take a step which Mr. Jessop in his heart considered in the highest degree indecorous and imprudent on the part of a

widow lady, and this was to receive a gentleman into her house as a lodger. After her husband's death she had found her residence inconveniently large, but she did not like moving—besides, where should she get such another studio? and therefore it occurred to her that if she could meet with an inmate, who would rent some of the upper rooms, it would be a comfortable and economical arrangement.

Mr. Jessop suggested that she should have her mother to reside with her; but then, as Mrs. Mayne put it to him, what was the use of that? Her mother could not pay anything for the accommodation; and besides, she and her mother never agreed well together—they were both too fond of having their own way, so that *that* arrangement would not suit at all. After a while a Mr. Wilde was introduced to her, and as he was represented to be a man of

good property and respectable connexions, Mrs. Mayne thought herself very fortunate in securing him as an inmate.

Mr. Jessop again entreated her to have Mrs. Baring to reside with her. He had great faith in that lady; she dressed so well, and was always so strict in her regard for the proprieties. But Mrs. Mayne flatly refused to do so.

"I'm quite able to take care of myself," she told Mr. Jessop; "and I don't mean to quarrel with mamma if I can help it, which I shall be sure to do if she comes to live with me. Besides, as far as the propriety of the thing is concerned, she'd be of no use. She's much the best-looking of the two, so if Mr. Wilde's inclined to fall in love, he'll be far more likely to do it with her than with me."

So Mr. Wilde came to Courtmain Street, but the arrangement had not in all respects

proved so satisfactory as Mrs. Mayne had anticipated. Mr. Wilde was not so regular either in his hours or his payments as could be wished; and she was beginning to think of giving him notice, when she found Mr. Jessop had called to advise her to do so, moved thereto by sundry reports which had reached him as to Mr. Wilde's character.

He had ascertained that he was not a bachelor, as he had professed to be, but a married man, who had left his native town—and Mr. Jessop hardly knew how to bring himself to say as much to a lady—in company with some one who was not his wife. And he had refused to return to his home and his marital obligations, and had altogether so comported himself, as to be anything but a desirable inmate for the home of a widow lady. All this Mr. Jessop told as delicately as he could well do it—he felt the awkwardness of having such a commu-

nication to make to a lady, and was very glad when he had come to the end of his tale; though even then he sat folding his hands a little nervously, and looking and feeling embarrassed by the duty he had taken on himself.

But Mrs. Mayne was not at all embarrassed. It might be a very unpleasant thing for Mr. Wilde's wife that he had behaved as he had done; but she could not see how his doing so affected her. She had her own ground of complaint against him, quite apart from the propriety of his conduct in his matrimonial relations, and startled Mr. Jessop by letting him see what she thought the most serious part of the matter, by saying, when he had concluded, "But the worst of it is, he don't pay!"

Was *that* the worst, Mr. Jessop thought?—whatever had his friend Mayne been thinking of to marry a woman so lost to every

right and delicate feeling, as to think the very worst thing a married man could do was to be behindhand in his payments? He sat looking at her in amazement—Mrs. Mayne appeared to think so little of all Mr. Wilde's infractions of the moral code, compared with his shortcomings in pecuniary matters. But Mr. Jessop had not come there with no other purpose than to inform Mrs. Mayne of her present lodger's delinquencies—he knew very well that if Mr. Wilde went, she would have another in his place as soon as she could obtain one, and a friend of his own having intimated a wish for a set of apartments such as Mrs. Mayne would have to spare, if Mr. Wilde vacated her rooms, he felt it would be a desirable thing for both parties could he bring them together. Not that he approved by any means of Mrs. Mayne having a gentleman as an inmate; but, still, if she *would* have one,

why, Mr. Ensdell appeared to him the very man, as he had known him too long to have any doubt as to his solvency and respectability; only being, like Mrs. Mayne, an artist, he would require the studio. The question was whether she would give it up—Mr. Jessop himself was in hopes she would. He did not like the school of female pupils, and he had heard very dreadful things of the general scope of Mrs. Mayne's teaching; and he considered the whole affair beneath her, and unworthy the memory of his late friend, who had left her so well provided for. What did she want with a school, as he asked her now—very timidly, however, for he was a good deal afraid of Mrs. Mayne—and why should she continue to paint, herself, while she could live without it? Or, if she must paint, couldn't she do it in a quiet, lady-like manner, in her own sitting-room, and let the studio to Mr. Ensdell, who

was willing to pay thirty pounds a year for it—a great deal more, in Mr. Jessop's opinion, than Mrs. Mayne would ever make by her pictures.

Mrs. Mayne heard his proposal with more patience than he had expected of her. She was getting a little, just a little, tired of the school. The girls were very tiresome at times—she despaired sometimes of even making Mary Norton adopt her own views of high art; and thirty pounds a year, comfortable as her income was, would be a satisfactory addition to it; while the dining-room might for the future suffice for her to paint in. She told Mr. Jessop she would take his proposal into consideration, and let him know her answer the next day, if he would only undertake to relieve her from Mr. Wilde, which Mr. Jessop promised he would endeavour to do. And then he took his leave, congratulating himself on having

for once performed his duty to his friend's widow, with some satisfaction both to himself and to her.

CHAPTER VII.

SARAH'S CHILD.

JUNE. The dull cold spring has passed away, and summer in all its glow and warmth pervades the land. A summer worth the name; not the lukewarm, dull, drizzling imitation we have had in these late years. Just a summer for the country, and out-door life; a summer to sit in the shade at noon-day, and watch the dragon-flies flitting past, to drink in the sweet smell of new-mown hay and roses. A summer when, to those who come from town, every breath is a delight, every sight and sound a pleasure; when the evening is the only time for walking,

and we loiter till the dews are falling, and the moon is high, through field paths, or narrow lanes, making the most of the pleasant time of coolness that comes to us after the heat and the glare of the day.

June—one of its brightest and sunniest afternoons. The sunshine falls upon a mansion in Homeshire, about fifteen miles from town. It must have been built about the time of Queen Anne, and has a solid look of unmistakable comfort and respectability pervading it. Not so large as to require an immense income, or an army of servants to keep it up—a place that may well be supported by a couple of thousands a year, and that can be kept in order, both inside and out, by a small number of efficient domestics. It lies about twenty yards from the high-road, which, indeed, is so narrow, as hardly here to deserve the name. On the further side of the road is a meadow, fenced off by

a slight iron railing, so slight that it can hardly be seen from the house; some fine old trees stand here, and under their shade two or three Alderney cows, evidently selected as much for their beauty as their produce, are grazing peaceably. Just before the house the ground is laid in grass, which is now so high that the old trees at the side are standing knee-deep in it; and through this a broad carriage-path leads up to the mansion, from two large white gates that open on to it. The fence before the house is as slight as the one on the further side of the road, so that from the windows you appear to look on a small park, losing sight altogether of the road that passes between the field and grounds.

At the back of the house are the flower gardens, and beyond these are the orchard, &c., and beyond these again, and on either side, about thirty acres of rich meadow land.

A snug little domain on the whole, a place wherein a man might sit down contentedly enough to end his days, and enjoy the good things with which Providence had surrounded him—fresh air, green fields, old trees, fertile garden, and a home replete with all the comfort and luxuries of an English gentleman's household. Truly, a man would have much to be grateful for who had all these.

Was he grateful, the possessor of all these good things, as he sat by one of the windows of his study, looking out on the grounds before him? He should have been; he had known what it was once to want them all, and they had come to him without much effort on his part, and with even less deserving—come to him, too, at a time when he had thought all hope of such good fortune accruing to him was over, and that between himself and the respectable

and well-to-do folks who lived in good houses, paid their way, and were well spoken of by all, was a gulf so broad, no effort of his could ever bridge it over.

For he had not always been Maurice Stanton, Esq., with a balance at his banker's, a well-hung carriage, high-stepping horses, and a family pew in church. He had been somewhat of a Bohemian in his time, and had done things, gentleman's son though he was, from which many a born Bohemian would have shrunk. But he had seen the error of his ways, and turned from them when it had been profitable to do so, and ever since that time had worn fine linen, and fared sumptuously. There was no occasion for virtue to be its own reward in Mr. Maurice Stanton's case, when there was a rich uncle ready and willing to reward him with the heirship of his goods, if he would but turn from his erratic course, and

marry the well-portioned young lady he had selected for him.

Mr. Maurice Stanton had had to make one or two sacrifices to meet his uncle's wishes—sacrifices that other men might have hesitated to make, or, if they had been led by self-interest to do so, would have had troubled dreams all their life after. But Mr. Maurice Stanton was untroubled by nerves or sensitive feelings. Of all the world, the one person to whom he considered he owed a duty was himself, and having performed that duty according to his lights, he was not the man to let any over-refined scruples disturb him. There had been a woman to put out of his path, and a child to send from him; but the woman was not one in his own sphere, and the child was illegitimate. A couple of hundred pounds, and the trinkets and clothes he had given her, were sufficient provision

for the one; and as to the other, it was better with its mother than with him. What could he do with the little waif?—he who was hoping to have lawful heirs born to him, to inherit the wealth his uncle was to bequeath and his wife bring to him? Besides, it would be cruel to rob the woman of her child. She was a low, vulgar creature, with nothing to recommend her but the coarse red and white beauty that had caught his eye, and might serve to catch others; but she was fond of the little thing, so let her keep it. He was not the man to take it from her. So he had salved his conscience, and cheated himself into the belief that in performing the part of a villain he was acting as a gentleman should, and a gentleman, too, of a tender heart and a compassionate spirit; had married the little, plain, unhealthy heiress, and two years after inherited all his uncle's

belongings, and in his turn reigned at the Oaks.

His wife bore him one child, a daughter, within a year after marriage. When the little one was eight years old, she left her motherless; and as Mr. Stanton never married again, Nelly was looked upon as her father's heiress. He might have easily found another mistress for the Oaks, but he would give Nelly no rival in her home. He had grown to love this child with the one love of a cold, selfish, narrow soul. He had liked his wife indifferently—just enough to make living with her endurable, but he had never loved a woman, or known a friend in all his life. He had sinned in his youth, and without the excuse of passion he had led a disreputable life, and associated with questionable companions, because it so pleased him for the time; and when it pleased him better to turn from these unprofitable ways, he had

done so without one shadow of regret at leaving those who, let their social sins have been what they might, had before now shared their last sovereign with him in his need. He dropped them all when it pleased him to become respectable, as coolly as he did the fast garments he had worn in his earlier career. Neither suited him now, and it cost him no greater effort to throw off one than the other.

But he cared for his child. *This* child at least. What had become of the other—a daughter, too—he never troubled to inquire; it might have been smothered by its mother in a drunken sleep—women in her class do such things at times; run over when playing in the gutter, poisoned by dirt, foul smells, bad food; or, if living still, have become one of the nameless outcasts of the London streets, for aught he cared. It had been a dark-eyed infant of three months old when last he saw it; and he had never cared for babies

—besides, what claim could this one have on him, that the two hundred pounds he had given its mother would not amply cover? He had done his part so far—it was for the woman who bore it to see to the rest. Child and mother had been put from him with the things of his past life. It was rarely, indeed, that they ever crossed his memory now. What had they to do with all his present trim respectabilities? He had put the sins of his youth far from him; why should he be disturbed with the recollection of those associated with such sins? He had his daughter and heiress to care for now—Miss Stanton of the Oaks—Sarah's child, to delight and take pride in. Let Hagar and her offspring go their way. And it mattered little to him that for such as *his* Hagar angels rarely come to help them on the road.

This child was the embodiment of his respectability. Her birth had been recorded in

the *Times*, and the *Morning Post*, the *Milford Observer*, and the *Homeshire News*. Silver mugs had been presented at her christening, and the relations on either side looked elate and triumphant at the tiny morsel in its low robe and cap. Nurses and governesses had done their best to guard and train her. Masters had been employed to complete the work; and now, though not seventeen, Eleanor Stanton was not only the belle of Summerly, but regarded as a young lady of as good promise and expectations as any in Homeshire.

Her father had laid down his book, and was looking on her now as she sat under one of the old trees, her pet cat, a black and white dainty little creature, whom her mistress had christened Titania, on her lap, a book by her side which she had thrown down, and a basket of strawberries, which she was leisurely eating, in her hand. A pretty girl,

there was no question of that, with brown waving hair, which, when the sun shone on it, had a golden gleam; large dark grey eyes, eyes that sparkled, and shone, and danced, and laughed with every changing mood of their owner; a daintily-moulded, dimpled chin, exquisite little ears—the careless way in which the hair was thrust behind them showed their beauty now—and ripe red rosy lips, that, whenever they laughed, and that was persistently, had an unconquerable habit of showing the whitest and prettiest teeth in the world. Still, rosy and laughing as the lips and pearly as the teeth were, the mouth was the fault of the face. It was too large, and when in repose there was a firm set expression, which told something for the young lady's force of character.

Eleanor Stanton had a will of her own, as most people who knew anything of her were aware already; and though that will, as

yet, was only exercised on small matters, still there was the latent force ready to spring into action whenever circumstances called forth its full energies.

A girl with a will of her own, there was no question about that, as her father knew. Once or twice that will had come into collision with his own, and it had conquered. They were small matters, as I said, and Mr. Stanton had thought it best to yield; but something told him that if ever a time came when his will should be opposed to his daughter's in greater things, he would have to yield too. He half blamed himself; he had spoiled her so thoroughly, what else could he expect from her? There would be nothing for it now but to give her her way to the end, treat her like a petted child, and keep out of her sight whatever it was not expedient she should have. But Mr. Stanton did not do his daughter quite justice.

Spoiled and petted she certainly had been beyond all reasonable bounds, but the wilfulness was by no means that of a child, and would have been there all the same had she been curbed and checked and snubbed and kept under, according to the good old-fashioned plan of training youth in the days of our forefathers.

Only the wilfulness might have become sheer obstinacy, and the outspoken truthfulness have been warped into something very different. On the whole, Eleanor Stanton was not much the worse for all her spoiling. Her nature, like her complexion, could stand a great deal of sunshine, and thrive and bloom the better for it.

Eleanor finished her strawberries, and taking the cat in her arms, ran towards the study; then she seated herself just outside the window, so as to be able to chat comfortably with her father, and addressed him:

"Now, papa, did the afternoon post bring you any news? I know you've had three letters, for I counted them myself."

"Well, Nelly, one of them concerns you, at any rate. Mrs. Winthrop will be really here to-day. She will reach Summerly Station at half-past five, and I have just told Jones to take the carriage down to the station for her."

"Oh! papa, you have taken my breath away. Dear me! just as I thought governesses and everything of that kind were done with for ever! Now, what on earth am I to do with Mrs. Winthrop when she comes, and what on earth is she expected to do with me?" And Nelly cuddled her cat and looked up at her father, as if defying him to answer her question.

"Don't be absurd, Nelly. A girl of your age, with no mother, wants a chaperon, as a matter of course."

"No, I don't, papa—you're quite mistaken—I don't want one at all," said Nelly, demurely, twisting Titania's whiskers round her fingers.

"Allow me to be the best judge of your wants in this matter," said Mr. Stanton, rather crossly. "At your age, and in your position, it is necessary to have some regard to the proprieties of life; and a chaperon to accompany you into society, and, in fact, on all occasions whenever you go out, is indispensable."

"Whenever I go out!" repeated Nelly, solemnly. "Then I hope, for her own sake, Mrs. Winthrop wears thick boots, and has some notion of climbing stiles, or I'm afraid I shall be a trouble to her. It'll be awkward if she's an old lady, for my walks somehow seem to lead me over all the stiles in the country. Or won't it satisfy the proprieties, papa, if we come to one that's quite

insurmountable, and she sits down on one side of it, while I run along with Floss on the other? And there's another thing, papa —now, is she troubled with corns?"

"Eleanor!" Mr. Stanton tried to look sternly on the laughing face upturned to his, a thing which, as Eleanor knew very well, he always found it impossible to succeed in, "do try and behave like a rational being for once." Eleanor looked gravity itself, and began metamorphosing her cat into an imaginary likeness of her expected duenna, by tying her handkerchief round her head. "Mrs. Winthrop is a lady—poor, perhaps, or she would never undertake the charge of a troublesome girl like you. She has lost her husband, and seen some trouble in her life. Now, I'm sure you've good feeling enough not to make things needlessly unpleasant for her."

Nelly looked grave in earnest now. Mrs.

Winthrop was poor, and had known trouble —and, after all, a duenna's life must be a very dull one. No one, as her father had hinted, would lead it from choice. It was a great bore, of course, to have such an infliction; but, after all, the poor infliction couldn't help herself, and might be deserving of some pity too. She would try and be good to her, and not exasperate her more than she could help. A little exasperation Nelly feared she would have to put up with, but it should not be very much. She twitched her handkerchief off Titania's head, turned that long-suffering animal adrift, and sprang into the study through the window.

"I dare say we shall get on, papa, very well, after the first. I won't be worse than I can help. Only you know it's in the nature of things that I should look upon Mrs. Winthrop as a nuisance; but I'll try and not let her find out that I do. There, give

me a kiss, and I'll go in the garden myself and gather some flowers for her room!"

She took her father's head between her hands, and looked down laughingly upon his face—a face that was still handsome, though five-and-fifty autumns had passed over it, and though the skin was seamed with wrinkles like an older man's. Mr. Stanton had lived too fast in his time to wear well. The moustache and beard were grizzled, and the hair was thin and grey. It was a cold, hard face, unless when it looked on Nelly.

She bent down her soft, rounded cheek for a kiss, and then ran out of the room to gather her flowers. Presently her father heard her voice carolling away in the garden at the back of the house, and crossed the room to a window which opened on it. He sat down to look at Nelly flitting amongst the flower-beds—to look at Nelly,

the very idol of his eyes and of his heart. Well, she was worth the looking at as she stood in the bright garden, with the sunshine resting on her—the very type of innocent, happy girlhood, shrined in her home, guarded by loving care, kept not only from the winds that might blow too roughly on her, but almost from the very knowledge that there were such winds at all—a girl who in her happiness seemed almost sacred—a creature who could know nothing of the coarse words, the evil ways, the dark things of the world, whose greatest care might be the purchase of a dress, whose heaviest grief the loss of a pet. Her very beauty was so bright and joyous in its tone, that it seemed as if the wearer of such a face was not to know the cares that trouble others. It harmonized with the gladness of the day, the sweetness of the air, the brilliancy of the flowers, with her dress so sim-

ple, yet so dainty—so evidently that of a rich man's child, with the pleasant home, and the soft English scenery spreading far around; but with sorrow, or shame, or care, what could that bright face have to do? Nothing, her father thought, as he looked on her. It was sunshine all around his Nelly—sunshine for ever within and without, if he could have it so; and the shade—let it fall where it would, so that it never rested upon her.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. MAYNE'S NEW LODGER.

MRS. MAYNE gratified Mr. Jessop by consenting to give up the studio, and receive Mr. Ensdell into her home. With a little trouble, and some loss of rent, Mr. Wilde was got rid of, and then Mr. Ensdell moved in. He made the studio assume a very different appearance to what it had done either in Mr. Mayne's time, or when his wife alone had taught high art in it. There was carved oak furniture now—if not Elizabethan, a very fair imitation of it—old china, bronzes, crimson draperies, and armour. Altogether, the confusion in the studio was very picturesque and artistic in-

deed, but it was very clear that Mr. Ensdell's predilections were not of the Pre-Raphaelite order. There was a prettiness in all he did, and he liked pretty things about him; but, as Mrs. Mayne said, when she had known him two days, "he was not of the stuff of which artists are made"—nor true workers in anything, she might have added; he was always beginning, never completing. Now it was the model who was in fault, then the colours. Where did those old painters get their pigments from? he would ask indignantly; and how was it possible to rival them, when the colourmen did their work so shamefully?

Fortunately for him, he could afford to take life easily, and treat art as a toy—not the worst toy, perhaps, that he might have chosen, but still nothing more. He believed himself capable of great things, if it once pleased him to execute them.

"If I had but had to work for my living, I should have been R.A. by this time," he would sometimes say; "but my maternal grandmother spoilt me for a painter when she so considerately left me those snug little investments in the Three per Cents. Some day I shall marry, and then there will be the necessity of working for my nursery—if I can only meet with a woman worth the bore of going through the marriage ceremony with. Or, without committing myself so irretrievably, I might do something if fate would only send me such a model as she sometimes favoured the old painters with. By Jove! to think of Titian's daughter or Raphael's Fornarina! No wonder those men painted as they did, with such faces always before them!"

However, if not a good painter, Mr. Ensdell was a model lodger. He gave very little trouble, and paid liberally and punc-

tually. He was very civil to Mrs. Mayne, and took her lectures on high art and his own inefficiency in good part. In truth, she amused him, as long as he did not see too much of her; and sometimes he was very glad to be amused, as most men are who have no aim or purpose in their life; and with Mrs. Baring he was courtliness itself. The handsome, clever old lady suited him admirably. She could talk so much and talk so well when it pleased her, that, as Mr. Ensdell said to Mrs. Mayne, "She is as good as a book, without the trouble of turning the page."

And Mrs. Mayne replied,

"Yes, mamma's capital company when she don't put out her claws."

Mr. Ensdell was about six and thirty, tall and slight, and with an air and manner much younger than his years. Studiously dressed, especially in his studio, when he

wished at least to look the artist, and delighted in a black velvet suit and careless necktie. How much care that apparent carelessness cost him! His light chestnut hair was elaborately curled, his forehead fairly high and broad, the eyes small, with an easy, selfish good-humour in them—an expression confirmed by the thin lips, on which a self-complacent smile was almost habitual. None skilled in character would have expected much of self-sacrifice or generous feeling from a man with such a mouth as that. Easy, good-natured, fairly liberal when funds were plentiful, and good-tempered when all things were as he would have them, its owner might be; but of any noble purpose, any serious aim, utterly incapable. It was the mouth of a lounger about town—of a *dilettante*, trifling his life away in small aims and smaller ends, but never of an artist or of a true worker.

Meg had gone occasionally to Mrs. Mayne's since Mr. Ensdell's arrival there. Mary Norton, and one or two of the other girls, were anxious to complete their painting of her. So the back dining-room, which had a very good light, was fitted up as a studio, and there Meg sat to them. Mary Norton worked hard at her picture, and when finished, Meg was allowed to look at it. The mere outline had startled here, but this did so far more. She flushed scarlet with the thought,

"And am I like *that?*"

It was such a revelation of her own beauty to the girl as her scrap of glass had never given her. Why, she must be as well worth looking at, after all, as even Eve, when she had all the light and colour of life around her.

The likeness was wonderfully caught. Mary Norton had been in love with her sub-

ject, and idealized it a little. The expression she had given the eyes was not the dreamy look they habitually wore, but the rapt glance with which they had rested upon Bailey's Eve. Mary Norton never forgot that look and unconsciously had portrayed it. Mrs. Baring found fault with her for doing so.

"I don't say you've flattered her—as far as mere prettiness goes, the girl is well enough. But you've given her the face of a Sibyl. Who ever saw a flower-girl with such eyes as those?"

Having finished her picture, Mary Norton said she should have it framed, and hung up in her own room.

"I don't say it's well done, Mrs. Mayne," she said; to which Mrs. Mayne frankly replied—

"Neither do I!"

"But," continued Mary, "I like the face—I

could look at it for ever—and I'm not sorry for the time I've taken over it; but I shall give up high art after this, and stick to my flowers."

"Then you're like all the girls I've ever had to deal with," said Mrs. Mayne. "Not worth the pains I've taken with you? I *did* think you'd have found something better to do with your life, than waste it on birds'-nests and buttercups. Half the women that are born have no minds, and nine-tenths of the others don't know how to use them. You've just taken a fancy to paint that girl, because her face pleased you, and though the drawing's defective, the lights weak, and the general effect washy and sketchy, it's not so badly done on the whole—there's promise in it. If you'd persevere with Dobbs or Marshall, who are ten times better practice, you'd do something in time, and might call yourself an artist ten or twelve years hence

—which is what you never will be, if you go on painting geraniums and dead robins for ever."

But Mary could not be induced to give up any more of her time to the prosecution of high art. She wanted new dresses, she told Mrs. Mayne frankly, and had been offered twenty guineas by a picture collector for a couple of water-colour paintings of spring flowers. Mrs. Mayne suggested brown holland wrappers like her own, but Mary preferred silk or muslin. Mrs. Mayne said she gave her up in disgust—she was the greatest disappointment she had ever had, and she would have no more to do with girls for the future. Then Mary Norton went her way, and Mrs. Mayne sat down to soothe her ruffled feelings by giving a few finishing touches to Boadicea.

She painted till the light began to fade, and had just risen from before her easel,

when she heard a knock at the door, and Mr. Ensdell's voice without.

"May I come in, Mrs. Mayne?—I've brought you the *Times*."

It was a daily civility of Mr. Ensdell's to lend Mrs. Mayne the *Times*. He took it in regularly, and generally sent it to her in the evening. He was just going out now to one of the theatres, and had brought it to her himself, as he passed her door. He entered the room as soon as Mrs. Mayne had given him permission to do so, and she bade him come and look at the progress she had made with Boadicea.

"Though the light is going fast, still I think you may see how I've stippled up the herbage she's treading on. Throws up the foot wonderfully, don't it? And I've thrown more shadow on the leaves in the back-ground."

Mr. Ensdell praised, as he was expected

to do, the stippling of the herbage, and the throwing up of Boadicea's foot—he was a man who found it very easy to praise; then his eyes fell on Mary Norton's picture.

"By Jove! Mrs. Mayne, where did you get that girl from?"

"I found her selling flowers in the streets, and brought her home for the girls to paint. She's pretty, for those who like that style; but it's not a face I should care myself for. I thought of recommending her to Stubbs and Jefferies."

"Don't, my dear lady, don't! Let me have the monopoly of that face—at least for a time. Where did you say she was to be found?"

"At the corners of the streets, selling flowers, half her time," said Mrs. Mayne. "She'll be here to-morrow. I thought of giving her a note to take to Jefferies. Shall I send her to you instead?"

"You'll oblige me infinitely! Good heavens! such a face to be met with at the corners of the streets; and all my life I've been looking in vain for a model worth the painting! One ought to do something with such a subject as that before one."

"Yes, if one's got the something in one's self," replied Mrs. Mayne. "But it wants an artist as well as a subject to make a good picture, Mr. Ensdell."

Mr. Ensdell felt himself snubbed, and took his snubbing meekly. He was quite aware that he was not Mrs. Mayne's ideal of an artist, and the knowledge did not distress him very greatly. He took out his eye-glass, and scrutinized the painting carefully. It had all the faults which Mrs. Mayne had so unsparingly pointed out to her pupil; but still there was all Meg's beauty, and there was the soul, too, which Mary Norton had caught out-looking from her eyes.

"Something might be made of that girl," he muttered softly; but Mrs. Mayne overheard him.

"Yes, there are a great many things she is fit for; and it's a face that would stand dressing. Refine her a little, as Mary Norton has done, and she would make a good study for an historical or classical picture. But you'll understand, I don't answer for her coming before you with just those eyes. If Mary Norton saw that look in them, it's more than I ever did."

"Your Mary Norton must be a clever girl, either to have seen that look or painted it. I wonder, if the look is in those eyes, whether I shall have thes kill to call it up. But I shall be late at the Haymarket. Good evening, Mrs. Mayne."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. ENSDELL FINDS A MODEL AT LAST.

THE next morning, when Meg called on Mrs. Mayne, she was told by that lady of Mr. Ensdell's wish to engage her as a model. She took it for granted that Meg would raise no objections; nor indeed did she. It was far better to be sitting, however still, in a warm dry room to be painted from, than to be standing at the corners of the streets, exposed to the pelting rain or keen wind, and paid much better; besides the pleasant consciousness, of which I have before spoken, that she helped "make pictures." Accordingly, Meg followed Mrs. Mayne's housemaid very readily into the

studio, and Mr. Ensdell not yet having finished breakfast, the girl told her she had better wait there till he came down.

Meg passed the time in looking about her. The studio had improved very much in the six weeks that Mr. Ensdell had been its occupant. The casts and busts were still there, as Mrs. Mayne did not know where else to put them, but he had brought in, as I have said, so many of his own possessions, that the appearance of the room was quite altered. The armour—a knight's cuirass—was a great puzzle to her. It couldn't be a saucepan, for it was open at the top and bottom; and the shield by its side was as great a wonder. Could that be a tray?—and if so, how did the cups and saucers keep upon it? She had a true woman's delight in the old china, and mentally pronounced the carved furniture too grand to be used! But these were all of less importance in

Meg's eyes than the additional busts and casts which Mr. Ensdell had brought into the studio. There was Clyte, and a head of Apollo. Meg turned enraptured from one to the other. But that which entranced her most was a life-size cast of Cupid and Psyche. The god was standing by the maiden, and bending over as if to whisper the words that she would never weary of hearing. The group told its own story. It was love, pure, intense, undoubting. Meg felt it so, and saw moulded in the clay before her the very embodiment of her own vague dreams and feelings. Would there be, in all the world, ever one to care for her as this one cared for the girl he was looking down upon? What a fine thing such love as this must be! Did it ever come in the way of common folks like her, or was it only meant for young ladies, with good clothes to wear, who played music, and painted pictures? Well,

she helped, too, in that, and if she was good enough to be put in a picture, wasn't she good enough to be loved in real earnest, as this girl here was loved, with a love as different from any poor Joe had ever felt, as this glorious, half-dressed creature before her, neither man nor boy, but something too beautiful to be either, was from the good-looking young costermonger, even in his best velveteen and necktie!

So ran Meg's thoughts, as she looked at Cupid and Psyche. Of late she had thought much less regretfully of Joe. Those sittings in the studio had done a great deal towards teaching her how much there was in the world that Swamp Town knew nothing of. The idle chatter of the girls, when Mrs. Mayne left the room, had been full of meanings to her. To do them justice, it was far better talk than you would hear from the generality of girls. Each one of Mrs.

Mayne's pupils had something else to think of than either lovers or dress. Art, at any rate, gave both their minds and their eyes other things to occupy them than either flirting or fancy-work. All their careless words about their occupation, and the things connected with it, about the books they had read, and the exhibitions they had seen, were so much mental food for Meg. She tried to find out the meaning of each allusion, the point of every little joke, and extract from all some nourishment for a new craving within her—a craving that even Joe himself, had he lived, could never have satisfied. Poor Joe!—he was still poor Joe! but Meg had begun to feel that, had he lived, there might have come a difference as great between them as even that his death had made.

I should have liked you to have seen her as she stood this May morning in Mr.

Ensdell's studio. Things had gone so well with her lately, for people had bought more flowers, and her sittings to Mrs. Mayne's pupils had been so remunerative, that she had been able to take a dress—only a lilac print, but still neat and whole—out of pawn, as well as a tidy black shawl, and buy herself a neat straw bonnet trimmed with blue riband. She had hoped, when she came, that Mrs. Mayne would not object to this improvement in her toilet—at any rate, she could but go back for the old patched gown if she would make her wear it; and she was glad indeed, when she found that she would have to make her appearance before a strange gentleman, that she had been able to procure some decent clothes. Her face had filled out since the chill March day when Mrs. Mayne first saw her, and she had taken more pains with the arrangement of her hair, and the additional time spent in

brushing it had been repaid by a lustre and glossiness that neither Rachel nor Rowland could have imparted. And the eyes had, if not the look that Mary Norton had caught, something yet more tender in their earnest questioning as they rested on the group before her.

So it was Mr. Ensdell saw her, as he opened the door of his studio, and drew his breath as he beheld a model than which neither Titian nor Raphael could have had a better. How did this girl come by such a face?—and how had she taught her eyes to look like *that* upon the clay before her?

"Enough to give it life!" thought George Ensdell. "Does she know what she is saying with those eyes of hers? A fellow had need to take care of himself if she once turns them like that upon him."

Presently Meg turned and saw him. Then the soul, with its longings and ques-

tions, passed away from the eyes, which regarded him as if he had been a possible purchaser of flowers, and dropping a curtsey in accordance with the look, she said,

"Please, sir, are you the gentleman as wants to paint me?"

Ensdell had been in a seventh heaven of rapture with his model. He felt himself on earth, and very common earth indeed, directly she spoke. He hesitated a little—indeed, he scarcely knew how to reply at first, the contrast between Meg's face and her tone and manner was so great. He looked at Meg the while, and she bore the scrutiny unflinchingly. Another girl might have blushed and turned aside from such a look, but Meg's beauty never knew the charm of blushes. They were not a natural product of Swamp Town.

"Perhaps he thinks I'm not good-looking enough—I ought to be, if Miss Norton's pic-

ture is like me," she thought; but she waited quietly enough—as she would have done had he been selecting flowers from her basket. Presently Mr. Ensdell observed, for want of something else to say, "You can come to me regularly, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, if it suits you. And I sit very still—the young ladies all said that of me," replied Meg.

"Well, we'll take our first sitting to-morrow. Now that I have seen you, I shall be better able to judge in what character to take you."

He looked at her attentively. What costume would suit her style of beauty best? Then he resolved just to secure the face and throat—make a portrait of her, in fact, and hang it up in his sitting-room. Like Mary Norton, he felt it was a face to look on for ever—"especially in a picture, where it can't open its mouth."

The eyes were wearing the quiet dreaminess which was all Mrs. Mayne had seen in them. But he knew how different they had looked both in Mary Norton's picture and under his own gaze. Could he do nothing to call such a look back? At least, he would try. He directed her attention to the group before her.

"A nice thing that, isn't it?" he said, nodding towards it.

"I don't know," said Meg, "but I like to look at it."

And she looked again; but it was only with a quietly curious expression. The one he wanted would not come at his bidding. He would try her with something else.

"I hope I did not keep you long waiting?" he said. "There are some books here you might have amused yourself by turning over."

He led the way to a side-table, on which

were some splendidly illustrated books, and a portfolio. He turned over some of the former for Meg's amusement, watching her the while he did so. She was pleased and interested, and thawed a little as her exclamation, "That's fine!—I like that, now!" plainly showed, but the look he wanted did not come back—not the look which he hoped to catch, and put in his portrait of her. There was a magnificent Shakespeare amongst the books.

"You might like to read this to-morrow, if you're waiting for me," he said.

Meg looked up to him with a little shame.

"I can't read—I never had no time to learn—I wish I could now—books must tell us such a sight of things—don't they, sir?"

"Oh! Lord!" thought Ensdell, "some one deserves to be indicted for soulicide. What words for such lips!" and he fairly

shuddered; Meg's grammar jarred on him as a false note would on a musician. He took up a portfolio. "There are some things here you would like to see, I think," he observed, as he turned the prints and drawings over.

Presently they came to an engraving of Guido's Beatrice Cenci. Meg took it in her hand, and regarded it attentively; then she laid it down, and looking up at Ensdell with eyes in which the tears seemed ready to start forth, said,

"Was there ever a poor girl, sir, that looked like that?"

"Yes! it's a sad story," said Ensdell, "too sad for me to tell you now. But you see you will find plenty of amusement here, if you should come early to-morrow. I shall be ready for you at twelve. Will that suit you?"

"Any time will do for me, sir," replied

Meg. "I don't go out with my flowers the days as I comes here."

"Shade of Lindley Murray!" thought Ensdell, "what an act of Christian charity it would be to teach this creature to read thy pages!"

Then he slipped some money in Meg's hand, telling her he had taken up her time, and must pay her the same as if she had sat to him. Meg thanked him and curtsied again—how he hated that curtsey, which savoured so of Swamp Town—and went her way, thinking there were good days before her, and if she could keep a little money back from her mother, she would try and find some school, where, big as she was, they wouldn't mind teaching her to read.

"And then I'll find out who Eve was, and that girl I've just been looking at."

CHAPTER X.

MEG'S EDUCATION IS COMMENCED.

"THERE'LL be mischief come of it, if you allow that girl to come and go like this, Rosa," said Mrs. Baring, a few weeks after Meg's first appearance in Mr. Ensdell's studio. "It's not a thing you ought to allow at all, and I'm perfectly surprised at your doing so."

"Well, mamma, I'm not responsible for Mr. Ensdell's movements. I've let him the studio, and how can I interfere with any one he chooses to have in it? If he don't know the proprieties by this time, I'm sure I can't teach them to him? Besides, what on earth

have the proprieties to do with a case like this? He pays the girl so much an hour to sit to him; she's a good-looking girl, or she wouldn't suit his purpose. And am I to tell him that because she *is* good-looking, I won't allow her to come to the house? In which case Mr. Ensdell would very likely look out for another landlady—but I'm sure he wouldn't for another model. But if you're at all alarmed, either on the girl's account, or on his, why don't you play propriety, and install yourself as duenna during the sittings? I've no doubt Mr. Ensdell would be very glad of some one to talk to, for, according to him, he never gets out of patience with his model but when she opens her mouth. Her grammar's something awful. He says there ought to be a missionary society, for the purpose of preaching Lindley Murray to the lower classes. Ask Meggy Powitt, when you see her, whether she

thinks such a one would do much good in Swamp Town?"

Mrs. Baring nodded significantly.

"He'd be ready enough to be one of the missionaries, if there were many such Pagans as this girl to be converted. However, go your own way, Rosa; I've done my duty, and given you my advice, and when you find out that Mr. Ensdell isn't *all* artist when a pretty girl is in the way, you'll have no one but yourself to blame for the consequences."

"I should be very sorry to say that Mr. Ensdell *is* all artist," retorted Mrs. Mayne. "It would be a very bad thing for art if he were; but, as far as this girl is concerned, I'm convinced he *does* look on her as his model, and nothing more. Her colouring is superb, and her outline faultless. *He'll* never do them justice, though he's raving of the sensation his picture of her as Scott's

Rebecca will create at the Academy next year. There are only two chances that his anticipations will never be realised; the first is, that he will be too idle to finish it; and the next, that if, by a miracle, it is completed, it will be too insufferably bad even for the Academy to hang."

Mrs. Mayne was rather bitter against the Academy. It had never yet hung one of her own pictures, possibly not being yet sufficently advanced in high art to appreciate their excellence. Her mother, without taking notice of her concluding remark, returned to the attack upon Mr. Ensdell.

"I've no doubt he appreciates her colouring and outlines quite as well as you do, and when he's tired of his picture, and no longer wants a model, will still be as ready to perceive their excellence. In plain English, Rosa, if you let things go on like this, you must be prepared either to give your

lodger warning next quarter, or see his model installed here as his mistress."

"Good gracious! mamma, you proper people are always the readiest to suspect improper things! When Ensdell's tired of her—I give him another month to be so in—I shall recommend her to Jefferies or Goodwin. She'd do splendidly for the last in his Eastern pieces, if he heightens her tones a little; and what greater harm can there be in sitting to Ensdell than to either of these? Or are you going to set your face against good-looking models altogether? Rather a change in your views, considering how often you've told me I look upon ugliness as a primary qualification for mine."

"Jefferies is an elderly man, and lives with his sister. No one would ever suspect him of falling in love with his model. Goodwin is married, and the father of a

family, and might paint Venus herself disrobed, without the slightest imputation on his moral character. Mr Ensdell is not married, and does not live with his sister, and is——"

"Well, mamma?" said Mrs. Mayne, brusquely.

"A man of the world, and neither better nor worse than men of the world generally are," replied Mrs. Baring, rising to take her leave. She had just finished luncheon, and went to the glass to put on her bonnet. She was as careful in this putting on as if she had been still a young woman—there was never a hair out of place, or the least minutia of her toilet wrong in Mrs. Baring. "I do wish, Rosa," she said, as she pulled out the bows, "you would remember that a dirty brown holland is *not* quite the thing at this time of day; and if you would remember that there are such things as brushes

and combs in the world, it would make a great difference in your appearance. Upon my word, to look at you now, you might sit to Mr. Ensdell, if he wanted a Gorgon's head."

As Mrs. Baring went into the hall, she encountered Meg, who had just arrived. She looked fresher and brighter than Mrs. Baring had ever seen her. It was very clear that she wanted no lectures upon the utility of brushes and combs. She had actually bought gloves!—they were only coloured thread ones, but, still, gloves at all were strange things for Swamp Town. Her dress was very plain, but the girl knew how to wear it; and her cheap black shawl draped her shoulders better than the Cashmere of many a great lady would hers. There was a little pink rosebud inside the bonnet—only a cheap flower, but it looked wonderfully well on the thick dark hair. Mrs.

Baring took it all in—gloves, rosebud, and the wonderful plaits of hair, and made her own comments as she passed the girl, and slightly nodded in return to her respectful curtsey aud good day. Of course things were going just as she had expected they would go. Well, she had done her part, and warned Rosa, who, however, never could be taught to behave with common sense, and who would have no one but herself to blame, let things take what turn they might. And the turn they *would* take, Mrs. Baring thought was very clear.

However, they had not taken this turn yet, whatever they might do. Mr. Ensdell was very much interested in his model; but because he believed that if he did her justice, she in return would immortalize him. And he wished to keep her to himself—it was altogether a face too rare to be thrown away upon such as Goodwin and Jefferies,

of whom Mrs. Mayne had spoken to him as likely to engage her. So he paid Meg well, and took up a great deal of her time, so that she had quite given up her flower-selling, and often spent more than half the day in his studio. It was these protracted sittings that had alarmed Mrs. Baring's sense of propriety. Unnecessarily as yet, however, for Mr. Ensdell was often out of his studio for hours while Meg was waiting for him. He would fix a time for her to come there, and not make his own appearance till an hour or so afterwards. She was there, so she couldn't be anywhere else, and he should pay her for her time whether she sat to him or not; and he would finish his cigar and his novel, and then walk in leisurely, with a careless half apology, and direct Meg how to place herself in the right light and position, and proceed to work in tolerable earnest.

Sometimes friends came in, who com-

mented on the progress of the picture, and stared at Meg; but she was used to being stared at. And then Mr. Ensdell would leave off painting, and chat with his visitors over the current topics of the day—such of them, at least, as interested him and them. The races, the last new singer, the *on dits* of the papers or the clubs, choice bits of scandal or gossip; there was no occasion for any reticence to be practised before his model. A girl from Swamp Town, who must have lived all her life in an atmosphere to which that of his studio, even when the jokes were freest, and the slang the loudest, would be purity itself. Meg sat all the time as unmoved as when, outside the theatres, she heard the objurgations of the cabmen, or the hum, and the stir, and the ribaldry of the life that the gas-lamp, shone upon. Somehow, she did not listen as she had done to the chatter of Mrs. Mayne's pupils—some-

how, she did not like the gentlemen's talk so well, but she drew back in herself, and quietly thought out the last lesson she had learned, or the meaning of the last page she had read.

For Meg had begun to learn lessons and read books. A new lodger had come to the house she lived in—an elderly, broken-down, ruined man, who had been a banker's clerk in his day, and had lost his situation through drunkenness and dishonesty. He had been steadily going down ever since, and at last had drifted to Swamp Town, where he earned a living by various shifts—begging-letter writing amongst the rest. Meg knew he could read and write—rare accomplishments for an inhabitant of Swamp Town; and she knew, too, that he was desperately poor, so she kept some of her earnings back, and asked Mr. Twiss if he would instruct her in them. Mr. Twiss drove a

hard bargain—he liked the girl for her looks, as he coarsely told her, but his time was precious, and must be paid for. However, Meg was able to satisfy him and her mother too, and so evening after evening she spent in his small, close den, conning over Mavor's Spelling-book, and forming pot-hooks. Her mother did not interfere with her proceedings—indeed, she was scarcely in a state to do so, being generally, now funds were so plentiful, in a maudlin state of semi-drunkenness. Meg performed the few domestic duties necessary in their little home—washed, mended, and cooked; and when these offices were over, it was generally time to go to Mr. Ensdell's studio; and when she returned, had given her mother her tea, and heard her complaints of the neighbours' insolence, and the heartless manner in which they neglected her, it was time to go to Mr. Twiss, and reap what benefit she could from his instructions.

Mr. Twiss did not give himself very much trouble about her. He sat and smoked his pipe, and, if funds were plentiful, sipped his gin and water, while Meg spelled out her lesson, and then repeated it to him. He sat by her side while she wrote, and lazily directed her in the formation of her letters. Then she read aloud to him, and the reading was very wearying. The little easy lessons that alone Meg could master, were so childish and unmeaning. What did she want to know about Frank Pitt and Miss Jane's doll? It wouldn't be much good learning to read, if books could only tell her such stuff as this. But no doubt the books that gentlefolks read would teach her a great deal more, if once she was clever enough to understand them. Such books as Mr. Ensdell had shown her the first day she was in his studio, and which she had been afraid to touch ever since, with all her waiting. Some

day, when she went, she would open one of them, and try and find out what it was all about. Something very different from Frank Pitt or Miss Jane, she expected.

One indirect benefit she derived from associating with Mr. Twiss. Drunken and besotted as the man was, still he had been educated, and Meg was quick to perceive the difference between his mode of speech and that of her other acquaintances in Swamp Town. She had detected the same difference, but in a greater degree, in Mrs. Mayne's pupils and Mr. Ensdell. What was it made them all speak so unlike her? Did reading and writing make folks talk like that? or was it their being born gentlefolks, for even Mr. Twiss, dirty, unshaved, and sordid as he went now, she suspected had had a great fall before he alighted in Swamp Town. If reading and writing would do it, why should not Meg in time talk as the

young ladies who first painted her had done? And then there came a dull, heavy consciousness that the difference between herself and those girls was one greater than even reading and writing could overcome. What was it?—where was it? Meg did not know, but felt it all the same.

She was late this morning in arriving at the studio, for her mother had been taken ill in the night; and Meg did not like to leave her till she had prevailed on one of the girls she knew to come and sit with her. She was in hopes Mr. Ensdell would not be angry, for he had told her to come at twelve, and it was now past two.

But she need not have been alarmed; Mr. Ensdell had gone out of town the previous day, and had not yet returned. His absence had been caused by a visit to the Oaks, the master of which and he were distantly related. It was a pleasant place

enough for a day's visit this sultry weather, and Mr. Ensdell might have been tempted to protract his stay, but for his great wish to commence at once the picture of which he had been speaking to Mrs. Mayne. He had taken Meg's portrait, but it had not pleased him. It was a likeness, certainly; and, as a painting, much superior to Mary Norton's; but it was a tame, commonplace resemblance in features and colouring, while hers had caught an expression which his lacked utterly.

Meg was the perfection of a sitter, as far as stillness and docility went; but he could never call up the look he wanted—the look which Mary Norton had fixed on her canvas, or the look with which he had seen Meg regarding Psyche. On reflection, he was inclined to blame himself for this. Why had he not talked to the girl more? It was true, her grammar was very dreadful,

and her accent a positive infliction; but he must submit to that infliction if he wanted to catch the girl at her best; and why should he not try to improve and develop her? A girl with such eyes must have something within her to be improved and developed, and if he wanted his picture to be a worthy rendering of Rebecca, as she bent over the wounded Ivanhoe, he must try and bring out the latent capabilities of his model. It would be a bore—of course it would, the girl was so desperately, hopelessly ignorant; but still there was good material to work upon, and a purpose to work for. There was the clay, perfect in form, and might he not imbue it with a soul, and so at last have the model he had been wishing for all his life? He would try.

But in all this there was no thought of any such end as Mrs. Baring had so plainly intimated to her daughter. George Ens-

dell was, as she had said, a man of the world, and certainly no purer or better than men of the world generally are. But as yet, Meg was nothing but his model,—a model whom he was very glad to have, and in whose beauty he exulted, but who still required a great deal of improvement before she would be all that he could wish. After all, there was more of the artist in him as yet than the clever old lady gave him credit for.

Meg went into the little closet that opened from the studio, and proceeded to array herself in the dress in which she was to sit as Rebecca. The first sitting was to be to-day, and she had not yet tried on the dress. It was very handsome, and Meg felt the soft velvet of the upper robe with pleasure. She had never dreamed in all her life that anything so dainty, soft, and beautiful could fall to her to wear. Mr. Ensdell had spared no expense, and the costumier had taken great

pains to carry out his directions, so that Meg was as royally attired as even an Eastern princess need to be.

The jewels, indeed, were false; but that mattered little to Meg, who was not versed in such matters. But she liked the sheen of the silk, and its rustle when she moved; and it was pleasant to see the rich folds of the drapery, and to feel it sweeping after her. If she could always dress like this! She should not care much whether any one saw her or not—but it would be so nice always to wear these fine things—they would make her feel and look like a lady, in her own eyes at least. She passed the table where the books and portfolios were lying. To-day she felt emboldened to take one up. It did not seem such an impertinence now she had this grand dress to wear. She opened the illustrated edition of Shakespeare, which Mr. Ensdell had first shown her, and, after

looking at the pictures, tried to spell out some of the lines. She did not make much of it; but still she would not give up the attempt. Such a book as this must have something in it worth the reading, if she could only make it out. She was engaged in trying to do so when Mr. Ensdell opened the door and saw her.

He was enraptured with the effect of the dress, and Meg's occupation. Was she improving of her own accord—was his model waking of herself? If she could only read Shakespeare, there might be some hope of her. Why had he not thought of that sooner?—he might have read him to her.

Presently Meg looked up, and laying the book down, rose with her little awkward curtsey—a curtsey that always exasperated Ensdell, and never more so than now. It was so absurdly out of keeping with Rebecca's robes.

"For heaven's sake don't do that!" he exclaimed in a fit of irritation. "You can't suppose Rebecca ever did. If you could only feel the part as well as dress it, what an assistance it would be!"

Meg felt puzzled. What did Mr. Ensdell mean—and who was Rebecca? Was she dressed up to look like any one that had ever lived? Was there a meaning in these fine clothes, and was she to be painted, not as herself, as she had thought, with just these fine things to make her look the finer, but as some rich lady, who had always worn them, and who was not living now, to have her picture taken from herself? Was she, Meg, like her?—and if so, who was she—this Rebecca of whom Mr. Ensdell spoke? Would he be angry if she asked him?

"Please, sir," she said, "who was Rebecca, and how am I to feel her?"

"Look like her, if you can! Who was she?—well, a Jewess."

"And wore such clothes as these?" said Meg, whose ideas of a Jewess were connected with a stout personage who kept a small shop in a dirty, narrow by-street, leading out of Camden Town, and sold fried fish, which she had sometimes purchased.

"Yes, and better. It was a long time ago; she was very beautiful, as by this time you must pretty well know you are too. She fell in love with a handsome young fellow, who cared for some one else instead of her, and when he was ill, wounded in a tournament—but there, I don't suppose you know what that is—nursed him till he got well again."

"Did he care for her then?" asked Meg.

"Not as she would have had him—not as a man cares for his wife; he married the

other, and it's to be hoped lived happy ever after!"

"And what became of Rebecca?" said Meg.

"Turned district visitor, or something of the kind—gave all her finery up to Rowena—the other, you know—and spent her life in sick-visiting, and seeing that poor folks kept their houses clean, and sent their children to school—at least, I don't know that there were any schools in those days; but it don't matter, you know—she would have done, if there were."

Meg pondered over Rebecca's story, then she said—

"I should have liked to have known her—she must have been a good lady. To think of her giving up her fine things to the other! That must have been to make her look better in *his* eyes. She must have been very fond of him."

"Shall I read part of the story to you?" asked Ensdell; and taking up "Ivanhoe," he read aloud the description of the tournament, and Rebecca's appearance in it.

Meg listened attentively; then, when he had finished, said,

"What books do tell us, to be sure! I'll work harder at my spelling now than ever."

"Do," replied Ensdell, "and I'll make you a present of this book as soon as you can read it."

Then he directed Meg how to place herself in the attitude he wished her to take, and began sketching her. He worked hard, but more hopefully than ever. There had come a light into Meg's eyes since his reading, and a change over her whole bearing, that made him feel as if, at last, he had woke the soul within her. He would persevere in these readings; they would make

his Rebecca live on the canvas. He had found the true charm now with which to wake his statue into life, and he would take care it never slept again.

When the sitting was over, he told Meg he would read the book through to her, if she liked—a chapter or so every time she came—and Meg's eyes glistened with delight as she thanked him. She took off her beautiful dress with a sigh; it seemed so hard to have to put on that lilac print again, but she should come back the next day, and be dressed like a queen, and hear more of that wonderful book, and talk to Mr. Ensdell. He was very, very good-natured, after all. Meg had never felt much prepossessed in his favour before, but she felt as if she could like him now almost as well as she had done that Miss Norton who first took her picture.

She went out of the room; and Ensdell

said to himself, "Cinderella again," as she passed him; but he saw that Cinderella had not forgotten her training as princess, after all, for, as she went out, instead of the little curtsey which had so annoyed him, she gave a slight bend of the head, as she had seen Mary Norton do to Mrs. Mayne, and said, "Good evening, sir," with an accent as refined as Mary Norton herself could have used.

"Something might be made of that girl," said Ensdell to himself, "if any fellow were disposed to try—something more than a model, after all. I think I have roused her at last."

Were things taking the turn Mrs. Baring had foreseen, or was Meg to be nothing but the model?

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL MAN.

MRS. WINTHROP was duly installed at the Oaks, and Eleanor found her presence there less of an infliction than she had anticipated. She was very gentle, very precise, but evidently much more afraid of her charge than the young lady was of her. The walks were trying; Mrs. Winthrop wore black always, and the dust of the country roads was detrimental to her flowing draperies; then she was afraid of horned cattle, and had a true Cockney's horror of insect and reptile life. Eleanor wished devoutly her last governess, who was an unflinching pedestrian, and had not the slightest fear of

either cows or caterpillars, had never been so false to her pupil as to marry and desert her; or that her father had been satisfied that she wanted no other guardianship than his, and not been induced to install that poor, pale, feeble Mrs. Winthrop as chaperon; but there she was, "a great nuisance," as Nelly frankly owned to herself, but still to be made the best of.

It was quite out of the question her exercising any control over Nelly, and she never attempted it. A faint remonstrance, when the dust was too powerful or the cows looked too threatening, was the utmost Mrs. Winthrop attempted. Nelly saw her chaperon's weakness and her own strength at once, but she was too good a girl to abuse the knowledge.

"It's quite out of the question her taking care of me, so I must of her," she said to herself; and soon found quite an interest

and occupation in looking after and petting Mrs. Winthrop, who had a mild, faint invalidism, as mild and as faint as everything else about her, and was very ready to give herself into the hands of her energetic charge to be taken care of accordingly.

It might have been well for Nelly if she had met with a woman of a different stamp. She would have been all the better for a little guidance and direction. Her impulses were right and true, but they needed some control. As to her father's exercising it, that was out of the question. He had systematically done his best to spoil Nelly ever since she ran alone. Fortunately for herself, Nelly's was not a nature to be easily spoiled, but the girl sometimes wearied even of the roses with which she was smothered—roses from which the thorns had been so carefully extracted. Life was all smooth sailing under summer skies at the Oaks; sometimes Nelly

felt tempted to wish for a little stormy weather, as a change.

This life was, or should have been, a happy one; but it was dull, with all its happiness, at times. Nelly, at seventeen, felt herself a little *blasée.* Croquet-parties and archery-meetings were all very well in their way; but then, as Nelly felt tempted to ask, with a little indignation, was there nothing better in the world for her than croquet-parties or archery-meetings? Or were these all that she was sent into the world for? Was there nothing higher than all these little country festivities, these dinner-parties and dances in the winter, these out-door merry-makings in the summer? They were good things enough in their way, but their goodness palled on Nelly. And she had many other good things, too—her pleasant home, her flowers, her pets, her pretty dresses, and her doting father; but

then—that was the trouble to Nelly—why had so many good things fallen to *her* share? —and why were there so many who had to go without altogether? She had been kept from the very knowledge of evil and sorrow as much as possible; but then she was not a girl that it was easy so to keep. There were books, and they told her something; and Nelly had keen eyes and quick instincts of her own, and they told her a great deal more. She would have liked to go visiting amongst the cottages of the labouring poor around, but her father shrank with horror from the idea. There were always measles, and fevers, and infectious diseases in such places—there was no knowing what evil might befall her if she ventured in them. Or if she entered a house that might return a clean bill of health, physically, there was no answering for its moral atmosphere. These coarse village girls were not fit to

come in contact with his Nelly—there were many of them, as he knew, whose very touch he would have considered contamination to her. Sin was an ugly thing, and a vile—it should not come near his child. Few had a better right to know of its ugliness or vileness than Mr. Stanton. He had seen it near enough.

Not but that Nelly was allowed to be charitable, after her father's fashion. Charity—that is, a certain amount of almsgiving—was a very graceful feminine attribute; his daughter ought to possess it, as she ought to possess every other accomplishment and good quality befitting her position. So Nelly was allowed to give a few old women, who came up to the house to receive them, warm garments in the winter, and to visit the girls' school now and then, and give prizes to those who most distinguished themselves. *Au reste*, Mr. Stanton subscribed to all the

local charities, and a few of the London ones, and was very well satisfied with the use he made of his wealth, and the manner in which he filled his position—a great deal more so than Nelly was. Something was wrong, she felt, in the world around her; but where the wrong was, or how it was to be rectified, was more than she could tell. She would have liked to have gone finding out the evil for herself, and trying what, with her little powers, she could do to set it right. But then she felt shy and awkward in setting about the matter. I think if it had not been for this shyness of hers she would have cared little about her father's wishes, and would have found some way of her own to overrule them. But where to begin, and how to begin, what to do, and the right way to do it, were the questions that troubled Nelly. If she had once been satisfied on these points, I think

the young lady would have done as she pleased in the matter.

It may be seen that Nelly had sufficient affection, but not too much reverence for her father. Unhappily her training had not been such as to imbue her with much reverence for any one. The only person to whom she felt at all inclined to yield it, was perhaps the unluckiest man she knew—Arnold Ensdell, half-brother to the gentleman who just at this time was painting Meg as Rebecca, and doing his best to imbue his model with some perception of the character.

Arnold Ensdell had hitherto been an unsuccessful man. Things that would have gone smoothly and pleasantly with others, seemed always to go wrong with him—an evil chance attended his best efforts for success; and even the attempts of others to help him appeared to be as abortive as his own. His father insured his life solely on

Arnold's behalf, his elder brother George being amply provided for by his grandmother; and forgetting to keep up the insurance, died precisely a week after the last day allotted for payment. Arnold bore the loss with tolerable philosophy—he had just been called to the bar, and his mother having been some years dead, there was no one but himself to be affected by it. His prospects were good, as an old friend of his father's, a solicitor in first-rate practice, had promised to put as much in his way as he could. He sent Arnold one brief, and never lived to send another, dying at the very time when he might have been of most service to his young friend. Arnold took to writing while waiting for more briefs, and the editor of the *Piccadilly* was sufficiently satisfied with his first few papers, in which some jobbing in high places was exposed, and some long-standing abuses fearlessly at-

tacked, to promise him an appointment on the staff. But the editor quarrelled with the publisher, and the end of it was, he threw up his berth, and the *Piccadilly* veered round in its tactics, and there was no talk of any further employment for Arnold Ensdell as one of its contributors. He got on at the bar "somehow," as George Ensdell, the lucky man of the family, used to say with a shrug of his shoulders—earned a little now and then by writing for the magazines, and once in a while saw a brief in his chambers; and after a time had the promise of a good colonial appointment—so good a one, that it seemed at first as if his usual ill-fortune was deserting him, when just at the time that a vacancy occurred, he fell dangerously ill, and, on his recovery, found that the post promised to him had been conferred upon somebody else. Always the way, always—Fate never seemed weary of teasing him—

for ever holding the cup to his lips, only to dash it away. He was an "unlucky dog," and that was all that could be said about it, according to George Ensdell, who appeared to consider his own more fortunate position no more than was due to his own deservings.

There was nine years' difference between the two half-brothers. George Ensdell had been one of the seniors at a great collegiate school, while his little brother was just mastering the first rudiments of knowledge at a preparatory academy kept by two maiden ladies. Things had always been in favour of the superiority which the elder arrogated to himself, as a matter of course.

Just at the time he was thinking of selecting a profession, his grandmother departed this world, and was considerate enough to leave him all her possessions,—thus making him at once the millionaire of the family

—a very small millionaire, it is true, but quite sufficiently so to be exonerated, in every one's eyes as well as his own, from the necessity of labouring for his living—a necessity which was still incumbent on his younger brother.

George Ensdell, too, had the advantage over his brother that a perfect satisfaction with himself and his belongings, and a perfect freedom from *mauvaise honte* gives a conceited man over a shy and silent one. He was very fluent and voluble, and had an instinctive wish to please, which made him take pains even to propitiate Mrs. Mayne, by affecting to enter into her views of high art, or to seek to win Mrs. Baring's good graces by paying her the nameless little attentions which the handsome old lady was as ready to accept as ever. He had a kind word and a pleasant smile even for Sarah, who relaxed somewhat of her grimness

when she received them. He was welcome in many houses—some very pleasant ones—less in right of his very comfortable pecuniary position than of his suave flattering manners; for he had the happy knack of making people as pleased with themselves as with him. On the whole, he was a much more popular member of society than his brother, and found life altogether a far more agreeable affair.

Only for some vague reason, which she would have found it difficult to explain to herself, the young heiress of the Oaks had taken a great dislike to George Ensdell, while her feelings for his younger brother were of a diametrically opposite character. She detested George Ensdell's flatteries—flatteries which she saw were as impartially bestowed upon Mrs. Winthrop and her father as herself. He would be "all things to all men," though not perhaps in the apos-

tolic sense of the word, and therefore he should be nothing to her. She flung from her, as she would so much base coin, his little gallantries and studied compliments; while Arnold Ensdell, from his very gravity and reticence, impressed her with a feeling as near akin to reverence as her saucy wilful little soul was capable of knowing. And she pitied him too—he had been so undeservedly unfortunate; and then that terrible illness happening just when he might have retrieved all his ill-luck at last! Had he gone away, it is doubtful whether the young lady would not have forgotten the very fact of his existence in six months, unless reminded of it by others; but he remained, and looked weak and pale for a long time afterwards, and was likely to be poorer and more unlucky than ever; and so she let her thoughts dwell on him with an anxious interest that might possibly, if nobody else

came in the way, lead to a warmer feeling in time.

But it was not all pity, either. Arnold Ensdell, with all his ill-success in life, was not one of those men with whom a woman would feel that, if she united her lot with his, their rightful positions would have to be reversed, and she, not he, must be the prop and mainstay. Let his troubles be what they might, he bore them manfully, with a quiet, uncomplaining reticence, and seemed endowed with a persistence that must conquer in the end. And Eleanor felt instinctively that he was a better and truer man than his brother, and that Arnold Ensdell, in his poverty and struggles, was a nobler creature than the dilettante artist, with his easy fortunes and untroubled life.

Only one thing vexed her in him. Why did he always treat her almost as a child—a very lovely, gracious, winning child, but

still no more? There was ten years between them; and what was ten years, thought Miss Eleanor, between a *woman* of seventeen and a man of twenty-seven? They were quite on an equality so far, if he would only see it, and not pet and humour her, just as he had done when she wore short frocks and curls. If she could only teach him better—only—only—in spite of all his gravity, make him feel a little—well—yes, just a little in love with her. He had had so much trouble, and, she believed, so undeservedly—she would not like him to be very miserable,—only just sufficiently so to make him learn that his little cousin was a child no longer.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KETTLEDRUM IN THE STUDIO.

THE picture progressed; so did the reading of "Ivanhoe." Meg developed into a magnificent Rebecca, and Mr. George Ensdell was more and more satisfied with the manner in which it had occurred to him to improve her. They had conversations after the readings—conversations in which Mr. Ensdell did his best to cultivate his model's dormant perceptions. Meg was an apt pupil, and he had not much trouble with her; she made rapid progress in refinement and manner—had quite discontinued her little curtseys, and was beginning to improve in her grammar. Mr. Ensdell was very well pleased

with her progress, and Mrs. Baring, to whom the progress was equally perceptible, lectured her daughter more energetically than ever upon the evil consequences likely to accrue therefrom.

It was July now. The Academy would soon close, and Miss Eleanor Stanton, who had not yet visited it, announced her intention to her father and Mrs. Winthrop of doing so, and of calling on her cousin George before they returned to Summerly, to see the picture of which he had spoken so enthusiastically on his last visit to the Oaks. Nelly's curiosity had been roused by the manner in which he had spoken of his model—a *rara avis*, such as never yet had visited a studio, or been limned on canvas. It had not occurred to Mr. Ensdell, at the time he spoke, that it was in him to develop his model's latent capabilities, or he might have been more reserved on the subject.

Meg had improved very much in the last three weeks; but Mr. Ensdell would have been more reticent in her praises now. Nelly had no great faith in her cousin's artistic powers; but she had been led to doubt her own judgment of them, when she heard him speak of the hours and days he meant to devote to this picture, which, according to him, would be the gem of the Academy next year.

Mr. Stanton assented, as he always did, to every proposition of his daughter's that was at all within reasonable bounds, and Mrs. Winthrop, of course, was all compliance; and, therefore, they drove to the Summerly station two days after Nelly had expressed her wishes, and were in Trafalgar Square about two o'clock.

"Which will just give us three hours to do the best in," said Nelly; "we'll skip the stupid ones, then look in on Cousin George,

and make him get up an impromptu kettle-drum in our honour."

Mrs. Winthrop did not care for pictures, and she wished with all her heart that the young lady she was employed to take charge of did not either, for Nelly dragged her from one to the other, expatiating on their various beauties and excellences, till the poor lady was exhausted.

Mr. Stanton had come there to please his daughter, and having so far done his duty as an obedient father, took a seat opposite one of Landseer's paintings, telling Nelly she would know where to find him when she was tired. But poor Mrs. Winthrop could not do this; she wished, in her feeble, placid way, to do her duty as chaperon, and how was she to perform it by sitting still? There was nothing for it but to keep by the young lady's side, and listen to her raptures, and do her best to appear to

enter into them. Presently Eleanor looked up.

"You're tired, Mrs. Winthrop, and I don't believe you care for pictures one bit! Why didn't you say so? Go and sit down by papa, and I can look at them just as well by myself."

"My dear"—Mrs. Winthrop looked mildly horrified—"it is quite out of the question that I can allow you to go through the rooms by yourself. I will look at the pictures as long as you please, and go wherever you like; but, you know, it will not do for you to go alone. I am a little tired—just a little—but I wouldn't for the world interfere with your enjoyment."

"Then I'll sit down too," said Eleanor; and looking at Mrs. Winthrop again, she was sure that she was even paler than usual—"I'll sit down, and we'll leave earlier than I said; we shall be all the sooner

at Cousin George's, and have the longer time to criticise his picture. I've no doubt there are faults enough in it."

But Eleanor would have been glad to have been moving about with the throng; she had not seen one half yet that she wanted to see—but what could she do? It would be cruel to victimize poor Mrs. Winthrop any longer; but oh! dear, if she could only go on by herself, and look as long as she pleased at those pictures of Millais and Philips, of which the art critiques spoke so highly! What a nuisance it was to want so much care taken of her! She felt herself getting very cross, and was tapping the floor impatiently with her little foot, when Arnold Ensdell came up and accosted her. She sprang up with delight.

"I am so glad, Cousin Arnold!—you'll take care of me, won't you? I've knocked Mrs. Winthrop up already; and as to papa,

you know what his way of going through a picture-gallery is—just to look out for the first comfortable seat he can find, and keep there till it's time to go home. Mrs. Winthrop, it's all right now—Mr. Ensdell will take me about. We'll come back and find you when we're tired. Now, Arnold, let's go and look at that gem of Millais'."

Mrs. Winthrop would have opened her mouth in mild remonstrance, but the young lady had gone, taking her cavalier with her. Mrs. Winthrop was frightened, and hoped that Mr. Stanton would not consider she had betrayed her trust in allowing Eleanor to escape from her like this. What could she do?—get up and follow them? But they were out of sight already; and if this gentleman really was Eleanor's cousin, and, as from the name she supposed, a brother of that very agreeable Mr. Ensdell whom she had met at the Oaks, and whose picture they

were going to see, there could be no harm done. At any rate, she must remain where she was now, or Eleanor would never find her, and she could only hope that Mr. Stanton would keep his seat as long as she kept hers.

Arnold Ensdell was accustomed to be taken possession of by his cousin, and made useful in any and every way that it seemed right to her to make use of him. Both he and his brother were on a footing at the Oaks that their relationship alone would hardly have entitled them to. Mr. Stanton had other and much nearer relatives, from whom, however, he rigidly kept aloof. They had disgraced themselves by trade—a low, sordid thing in his eyes, from the contamination of which the Ensdells, at least, were free; and the brothers, in spite of the self-complacency and egotism of one, and the ill-luck of the other, were in tone and manner essentially

gentlemen; a great charm in Mr. Stanton's eyes. They gave no trouble, either, in their visits, and were, each in his way, amusing and well-informed. Very different ways, however; the elder and Mr. Stanton agreed on most points—their views on the generality of matters coincided as much as might be expected from two men whose characters *au fond* were by no means dissimilar; while the younger and he took antagonistic views of almost everything. The pleasure of arguing with Arnold was, however, a mild excitement to Mr. Stanton. Like his daughter, he sometimes found life at the Oaks, in spite of of all the solid comforts and luxuries that surrounded it, just a little dull.

Arnold's ideas on many things were censured by Mr. Stanton as Utopian and absurd, but then there was the pleasure of combating them, a pleasure he could never have experienced had they been similar to his own.

And it was these arguments with her father that had impressed Nelly Stanton with so profound a respect for her cousin. *She* agreed with his opinions on everything; the only point on which she felt inclined to quarrel was, that he never cared to broach them to her. He never brought Mr. Stanton over to his own view of any subject which they might discuss; but that was of little consequence in Eleanor's eyes. He was right, all the same, only papa would not own it.

"I am so glad you came, Arnold," she said, as soon as they were out of ear-shot of Mrs. Winthrop; "I shouldn't have seen half the pictures else. I've knocked Mrs. Winthrop up completely. The worst of it is, that's so soon done, which is rather hard for me—isn't it?"

"And for her, too, I should say," replied Arnold Ensdell with a half smile. "Do you know, little cousin, if I were a forlorn female,

and had to get my living, I should not think holding the post of young lady's chaperon the easiest way of earning it."

Nelly knit her brows at this speech. Always his little cousin—always a word or a tone to remind her of the ten years difference between them. She was silent for half a minute—a rare thing for Nelly; then said abruptly,

"We're going to George's studio. He was almost raving, the last time he was at the Oaks, of a new picture he was about to begin—and a new model he had engaged to sit for it. Have you seen either one or the other?"

"Not the picture, and only a portrait of the model. Very beautiful, as far as form and colour go—though he tells me he has scarcely done her justice; if so, it must be a face that one is fortunate to look upon once in a life-time."

"Come with us, then, to his studio, and see if you'll have that fortune this afternoon. What a thing such beauty must be, when even you can speak of it like that! I am longing to see the girl, and I feel half envious of her before I do."

"What, my little cousin!—*you!* did you look in your glass this morning?" replied Arnold Ensdell, bending down with a half smile.

"I wasn't fishing for a compliment, Arnold—there! Who would think of comparing my mere prettiness with such beauty as you speak of, or George described? A model, he said, that ought to make a painter! I *do* wish I had such beauty for my own. I think it must be the best gift of all that can fall to a woman."

He was always misunderstanding her. While she was thinking how she would prize the beauty that would enable her to be a

painter's inspiration, he was fancying she only wanted an idle compliment. Would he never—never treat her as a rational being?—never learn that she had, at last, left childhood behind, and was entering on her life in earnest? She was cross with him—cross with herself, and Arnold was too blind to see that she was so. He was always blind where she was concerned. Kind? yes, he was kind—the kindness of a grown man to a little girl—just the very kindness he had shown her ten years ago. He was leading her now from one picture to another, pointing out those he thought best worth looking at, and waiting patiently as long as she chose to feast her eyes on them; though it was his own third visit, and with many of those that interested her he must have been quite familiar. Kind, patient—oh! of course he was! and as ready to spoil her as her father. But she could not take his kindness kindly,

and was out of patience with his patience. What a comfort it would have been to quarrel with him!

Mrs. Winthrop was very grateful when Eleanor returned with her cousin. She had been on thorns all the time, lest Mr. Stanton should come up and find her alone. And her conscience had reproached her, too; the poor, timid lady was so nervously anxious to do her duty by her charge, and though it would have been difficult to prevent Nelly's running away, still she felt that she was to blame in the matter.

Mr. Arnold Ensdell might be her cousin, but still he might be guilty of making love; and Nelly was very young, but quite old enough to be made love to. But Mr. Ensdell looked a gentleman—surely he would not abuse his opportunities, and do what no chaperon could approve of under the circumstances? Only, gentlemen sometimes forgot

their good behaviour, when there was such a face as Nelly's in the way.

She felt a little more satisfied with herself when she saw Mr. Stanton's reception of Arnold Ensdell—when they all joined that gentleman, who had moved from one chair to another, and so persuaded himself that he had seen the Exhibition. It was clear that he was not afraid of Mr. Arnold Ensdell falling in love with his daughter, or would not be very angry if he did, by the warm greeting he gave him, and the manner in which he bade him take Nelly under his charge, on their way from the Academy to Courtmain Street, while he escorted Mrs. Winthrop.

It was so short a distance, that even Mrs. Winthrop thought cabs unnecessary when Mr. Stanton suggested them to her. He was always very considerate of her in these minor matters, and Mrs. Winthrop was meek-

ly grateful accordingly. She had had hard lines of it in her time, poor, faded lady, and Mr. Stanton's small courtesies were very pleasant to her.

They were not long in reaching 30, Courtmain Street. Nelly had been silent nearly all the way there; she was a little angry still with her cousin; he had taken too much pains in his explanations respecting the pictures—"as if she couldn't judge of them for herself!" But she brightened up as they neared Mrs. Mayne's door. There was the excitement of the possible chance of seeing this vaunted model—this model whose beauty was to make her cousin George a painter at last, and whose face even Arnold Ensdell had thought it would be something to look upon once in a life-time.

The weather had been so uncertain that Mr. Stanton had not thought it advisable to write to apprise George Ensdell of their

coming; but when last they had heard from him, which was a week before, when he wrote to decline an invitation to a croquet party at the Oaks, he had given as his reason for doing so, the incessant application he was giving to his picture—"working at it till the light fails me, and till my model, I am afraid, must be quite tired out. However, she is blessed with wonderful endurance; and I think I must sometimes tax it to the utmost."

The chances were, then, that he would be still at his work, and the model not yet have taken her departure. Nelly's heart beat quick as the door opened, and she turned on her cousin a face from which all the summer clouds had departed. "Oh! Arnold, shall we see this phœnix at last; and shall we find her a phœnix, after all?"

They reached the studio, and Nelly's question was answered.

Meg was there still, in Rebecca's attire, and half kneeling over the imaginary Ivanhoe, who had yet to be painted. She did not move when the door opened—she was the very perfection of a sitter, as Mr. George Ensdell often said. Let who would come or go, Meg kept her *pose* and her expression unaltered. There was no question as to her beauty—it was a face, Nelly thought, to be thankful for having looked upon, if only once. And the superb dress, with its rich colours and soft folds, harmonized so well with it. She looked born to wear such robes. A princess by Nature's patent. If anything could make George Ensdell worth the name of an artist, it must be the having such a face as that before him.

Mr. Ensdell rose to welcome them, and as soon as the first greetings were over, told Meg he would release her now, as she had been sitting so long. She was about to enter

her little tiring room, for the purpose of donning Cinderella's dress again, when Mr. Stanton interposed.

"We shall do your picture better justice if we compare it with the model, Ensdell; and we shall not be long—you might, perhaps, like to resume your *séance* when we have gone."

Mr. Ensdell motioned Meg to stay, and she sat down quietly by the side table where the books lay. She had grown more familiar with them in the last fortnight, and now took up one, and appeared to be absorbed in it. In reality she was watching the new comers—or rather one of them, Nelly. She did not care for the thin, pale, proud-looking old gentleman, who was surveying the picture through his eye-glass, and then comparing it with her. Nor for the pale lady in black, who looked as if she had never smiled in her life, and was ready to cry now

on the least provocation. She did not notice even Arnold's thoughtful, kindly face, nor the sad, grave interest with which he was regarding her. All her attention was given to the bright, happy, smiling girl, with her dainty dress, who Meg could see was looking at her with a pleased wonder at her beauty.

Meg was very glad to be *so* looked at, and by a girl who was herself so pretty and attractive. Her heart warmed to her at once. "I wish she would come and speak to me," thought Meg; "perhaps she will—Miss Norton did at times."

She took note of everything Nelly wore. It was only a simple summer dress, but it was very fresh and pretty. And the girl herself seemed so full of happiness—the eyes and lips laughing almost unconsciously. Even Meg, happy as she had thought the young students, and much as she had envied

them, felt that here was a girl whose path in life was a pleasanter one than theirs. It was something to be near her, and see the flutter of her ribbons, and her dress, the delicate gloves, the tiny bonnet, and the wealth of bright glossy hair, and to catch the faint perfume from her handkerchief. She put Meg in mind of the rose-buds she had once sold —she was so like a flower in her freshness and her apparent unconsciousness that there were such things as grief and trouble in the world.

"Don't suppose she ever cried in her life," thought Meg; "very likely never had a rough word spoken to her. It does seem strange that some folks have life made so easy to them, and others wish they'd never had a life at all—I wonder what it is that's at the bottom of it all?"

The picture was looked at, commented on, and praised. It really deserved to be so.

George Ensdell had, for the first time in his life, painted a picture worth looking at; and that this was so, was not all due to Meg's beauty. He had worked in earnest for once, and astonished even himself by the result. No doubt there was room for criticism, but then none of the parties now looking on were disposed to be critical; and even Arnold Ensdell, who had never found much to say of his brother's paintings before, was warm in his encomiums of this one. Mrs. Winthrop of course admired it, as every one else did, and echoed every one's opinion of its various merits; then she sat down, feeling very tired, and wishing with all her heart the young lady under her charge cared no more for pictures than she did.

Nelly had intended, as she had said, that George Ensdell should get up an impromptu kettledrum in their honour, but the model and the picture between them had caused

her to forget all about it, till she saw Mrs. Winthrop's look of fatigue.

"She's dying for a cup of tea, and hasn't the sense to say so! Dear me! I wonder what ever that poor creature did before she came in my way, to be taken care of." Then she turned to Mr. Ensdell. "Have you cups and saucers enough for us all, George? We came here for some tea, as well as to look at your picture. Have you got a housekeeper?—or who is it looks after you? Please tell her you're going to have a kettledrum, and I'll be the presiding genius of the affair. Mrs. Winthrop, let us both take off our bonnets, and make ourselves comfortable."

But Mrs. Winthrop did not feel at all comfortable. There was a great deal in Mr. Ensdell's studio that strongly militated against her ideas of propriety. There was a cast of a Canova's Venus, which she would have liked to throw a blanket over; and the Apollo

Belvedere gave her an uneasy feeling whenever she looked his way. She had the highest opinion possible of Mr. Stanton—he was always so considerate and polite, but she felt inclined, for once, to question his prudence in bringing his daughter here. As to the model—well, of course she was good-looking enough, but she must be a young person of very lax ideas, to come and sit for hours alone with a single gentleman, and let him stare at her face as hard as he pleased. Possibly she had her living to get, but it would have been a much more respectable way of getting it to go into service.

And the lay figure made her quite nervous to look at. She would not have such a thing as that in her own house for the world, it was enough to fill the servants' heads, and other people's, too, with all sorts of ideas about ghosts and similar uncomfortable things. She did not feel much re-

assured, even when Nelly took her bonnet away and placed it on the head of the lay figure, putting her own on one of its hands, and then sat down to pour out tea. The tea was good, and the bread and butter thin; but it was such a singular place to take it in, with Venus on one side, and Apollo on the other, and that bold young woman, in such a singular dress, sitting there all the time.

"I shall give Rebecca a cup," said Nelly, in a low tone; "I dare say she'll be glad of it; don't you think so, papa? Don't trouble yourself, Arnold, I'll take it to her myself."

"Keep where you are, Nelly," said Mr Stanton, sternly; "if you think the girl wants some tea, either of your cousins will attend to her."

He looked angry at the thought of Nelly's doing so. It was not for his daughter to come in contact with this low-born creature, picked up from the streets, and paid so much

an hour to let her face be transferred to the canvas.

Nelly looked puzzled and vexed. Why should she not take the girl a cup of tea? She would have liked a nearer view of her, and have been glad of an opportunity of exchanging a few words, but she could not say so, lest the object of her admiration should overhear her. Arnold Ensdell rose.

"I'll take her some tea, Nelly. Why didn't you ask me? You mustn't leave your place, when you're doing the honours of the table."

He approached Meg, and handed her the cup and some bread and butter. She took them timidly, and looking up, saw his eyes again fixed on her with the same grave interest in them. Why did he look like that? Almost as if he felt sorry for her—sorry—well, there had been enough in her life to be sorry for, if any one knew all about Joe, and baby, and the hard pinchings she had

borne at times; but he could tell nothing of it all—and if he could, why should he care for her? But it was very good of him to bring her the tea and bread and butter, and hand it to her as if she were a lady. She supposed it was the fine clothes made him do that. Ah! how nice it must be to wear such dresses always! He wouldn't have been so civil if he had seen her in her cotton gown and straw bonnet.

Mr. Stanton sipped his tea, and glanced curiously at Meg occasionally. She certainly did credit to Ensdell's taste. He was quite disposed to agree in his praises of her, and at the same time to think that, in the course of time, Mr. Ensdell might appreciate her attractions in other ways than as a model. Such things were, and always would be. Mr. Stanton was not inclined to think worse of his cousin on that account. If his own day for practising such little irregularities was

over, he was not at all inclined to censure a younger man for still indulging in them; provided, of course, they were conducted with that due regard to the *bienséances* which a gentleman ought to evince; and had the ladies not been present, he would not have scrupled to express his opinion on the matter, and congratulate Ensdell upon the discernment he had shown in appropriating to himself an object of such rare merit. Meg's style pleased him. Where did she get such hands from? They were not a good colour, but the shape was exquisite; and they were wonderfully small, too, for a girl who must have used them in household work. Mr. Stanton was a connoisseur in hands; his own, with their long fingers and filbert nails, small size and waxen whiteness, were an object of his daily admiration. It was a great trouble to him that Nelly could not be persuaded to take proper care of hers. She would garden

without gloves, and so expose them to becoming tanned and freckled; or she would let them be scratched by the brambles, which were so apt to tear her dresses, and her hands at the best would never have been such as he would have liked his daughter to possess, while this girl had evidently been born with fingers fit for a princess. The turn of her head, too, and the way it was set on her shoulders, was superb. How could a creature born in Swamp Town look like that? It would be Ensdell's own fault if he did not develop her capabilities—there they were, if he only went the right way to bring them out.

Tea was over, and Mr. Stanton pronounced it time to go. Nelly took Mrs. Winthrop's bonnet off the lay figure's head —that lady had a nervous disinclination to go near it herself—then putting on her own, ran up to Meg.

"I must tell you how pleased I am with that picture. I didn't think even Rebecca could have been so beautiful as she is there."

She was beaming with delight as she spoke. Eyes and lips overflowing with her innocent gladness. Somehow a great lump came into Meg's throat. The young lady looked so happy, and was—oh! she was sure—so good! She would have liked to kiss her, or, at least, to touch her hand. Mr. Stanton came up, looking more irate than Nelly had ever seen him look before. Whatever Meg's capabilities, they were not such as to make her fit for his daughter to come in contact with. He drew Nelly eagerly away without a word, but with a look that was partly understood by Meg.

"Thinks I'm not good enough, I suppose, for the young lady to come near. Poor girls and such as she ain't fit to be together. Well, she don't think so—I never saw a face

I liked so well. It's no use wishing, or I'd wish with all my heart that it might always look as happy as it did when she spoke to me. I am so glad she likes the picture!"

And Meg would have prayed, instead of wishing, that the light and the happiness might dwell for ever in that glad young face, had she ever in all her life been taught a prayer.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. ENSDELL IS OUT OF HIS ELEMENT.

MEG did not make her appearance at the studio the next morning, greatly to Mr. Ensdell's disappointment. Another day or so, and it would be finished, as far as Meg was concerned, and it was vexing to have her fail him like this. Besides, independent of the work he had in hand, Mr. Ensdell missed the small excitement that Meg's visits gave him. The developing process had been going on very satisfactorily—he had finished Ivanhoe, and had gone on to Kenilworth; after which, he had treated Meg to a little Shakespeare, and the results appeared all that he could have wished. Meg's beauty

ripened under this educational process—the dull languor that had shadowed it passed away, and her tones and manner imperceptibly became more refined. She was trying her best to speak as Mr. Ensdell spoke, and realize her own idea of a lady's bearing. On the whole, she succeeded very well, and Ensdell was greatly pleased with her progress. It was very vexing to have it interrupted like this; and then he perplexed himself to find out the reason. Had Meg played him false, and consented to sit to another artist, leaving him to finish Rebecca as he might? Or had she wearied of the work altogether, and chosen to return to her former trade of selling flowers? Possibly she might have had other inducements to this course—have fallen in love with some member of her own class, and have been persuaded by him to give up her visits to the studio, in order to preside over his *ménage*. Mr. Ensdell felt

something like a twinge of jealousy at the idea; and then the absurdity of such a feeling in relation to Meg and her possible lover, made him, for the first time, aware that the relations between himself and his model had assumed rather an uncommon character. It was the necessity of developing her that had done it—what would his Rebecca have been like if he had left Meg just as he found her?

The next morning came, but still Meg did not make her appearance. Then Mr. Ensdell waxed wroth, as he looked at his Rebecca's hair, which still wanted the gloss and sheeniness of Meg's. How should he get it, without her tresses to copy from? There was no hair to be met with like it. Then, too, the drapery was not completed. Well, the lay figure might do to arrange that upon, but to work from a lay figure for his Rebecca! To have that stiff piece of mechanism before his eyes instead of Meg's glowing,

supple form! He felt that without his model it would be impossible to complete his picture—it would not be worth the completing—it would sink from work that was a pleasure and delight to a sheer soulless drudgery. No, if Meg did not come back, there would be nothing for it but to throw up his picture in despair, and turn Rebecca's face to the wall.

He was standing in his studio, biting the handle of one of his paint-brushes in his vexation, when the postman's knock sounded at the street-door, and a letter was brought in—not a letter by any means like those Mr. Ensdell was in the habit of receiving, the envelope being of the cheapest make, while the enclosure was a half sheet of note-paper, strongly smelling of tobacco. Mr. Ensdell turned it over superciliously, but the writing, at least, was clear and legible, and he read, without any difficulty—

"2, Prospect Place, Pleasant Road, Swamp Town.
July 20th, 186—.

"SIR,—I am requested by my pupil, Miss Margaret Blount, to inform you that, owing to the serious illness of her mother, she is likely to be prevented for some time to come from continuing her attendance at your studio. Miss Blount begs me to express her great regret at the inconvenience she may cause you, and to assure you that she will embrace the earliest opportunity of waiting upon you.—I have the honour to be, sir,

"Yours most obediently,

"FREDERIC JAMES TWISS."

This was how Mr. Twiss had rendered Meg's tearful "Tell him I can't leave mother, if it's ever so; but I'm very sorry for putting him out, and I'll come again as soon as mother's better—if ever she is."

Would she ever be better? That did not seem very probable. Mr. Twiss had seen

more of illness and death in his life-time than had Meg, and he looked upon her mother as a marked woman.

"It's the drink that's done it," said Mr. Twiss, sipping his gin and water; "she'd have been good these twenty years else. It's the drink that's done it. She couldn't keep from it, and no more can I. A short life and a merry one, or the merriest that a drop of gin can give."

Mr. Ensdell read this letter twice, and then thought over its contents. It was a great bore—a very great bore—that the woman should be ill; but why couldn't the girl get a nurse to attend to her? She would be losing her colour, and dimming her eyes, by doing so herself; and if her mother died, take to crying, which would spoil her looks more than ever. Where was Swamp Town? Could he find it out, and prevail on the girl to resume her sittings,

and let him employ some one to attend her mother? He would ask Mrs. Mayne if she could help him in the matter. She might possibly have some knowledge of the girl's residence.

"Swamp Town," said Mrs. Mayne thoughtfully, when he presented himself before her with the letter in his hand. "Well, I never was there, but I've some idea it's between King's Cross and Kentish Town. If Rebecca's not finished I'd certainly go, if I were you, and tell the girl it's her positive duty to resume her sittings till she is. The old woman will be just as well looked to by any one else. But if you do go to Swamp Town, I would advise you to leave your watch at home. It's not the safest place in the world to take such an article into."

Mr. Ensdell thought it as well to follow Mrs. Mayne's advice in the last particular, and then started off northward on his quest

for his missing model. He took a Hansom, but dismissed it when he approached the neighbourhood of Swamp Town, and went forward on foot. He almost shuddered as he walked through the narrow roads that the July sun had pulverized into layers of black fine dust, into which he often sank above his ankles. He seemed to breathe dust; not the dust of Regent Street or Rotten Row, but a dust that was essentially plebeian and coarse in its nature, being a compound of bones, ashes, and indescribable household *débris*. In the background he could see looming the gigantic cinder-heaps, and the figures of the women and girls employed on them. The small, wretched houses, half ruinous already, although not built a dozen years; the black, sooty gardens, where here and there a dwarfed sun-flower, a hollyhock, or a few stunted cabbages, tried to get what life and nourishment they could

from the parched earth and the foul, close air, inspired him almost with horror. Was it in one such as these that he should find Meg? And the coarse, loud-voiced girls who stood at the doors in their dirt and rags, were these her associates? Could his Rebecca have anything in common with such surroundings? He had heard of roses blooming on dung-hills, and pearls being found there. He felt as if he could believe such stories if indeed he found his model in the purlieus of Swamp Town.

He looked around for Pleasant Road, but when the wretched streets had been run up, their architects had omitted to have their designations painted on the corners, and he had to inquire his way of a dirty, half-clad boy who was nursing a fat baby, nearly as big as himself. The *gamin* directed him to turn round the next corner, and he would be in the road he asked for; and then, as

Mr. Ensdell went on, he heard him cry out loud to a fellow urchin who was digging in the dust with an oyster-shell, as more aristocratic children dig in the sand of the seashore,

"My eye, Bill! there's a swell! I wonder what he's up to here?"

Mr. Ensdell did not feel exactly comfortable under this remark. He had come as quietly dressed as a gentleman well could be, but still he felt that his appearance was a little out of place in Swamp Town, and began to wish that he had not ventured there. Not but that he might have brought his watch safely—ruffianism was not the prevalent tone in Swamp Town, the men, for the most part, earning their living either with the dust-carts, or as costermongers.

With all its heathendom, Swamp Town was not often disgraced by worse violence than that involved in the beating of a wife,

or a drunken quarrel between its male residents. But all this squalor and wretchedness was insufferably distasteful to him. Why were there such places? What were the police about, or the clergy, that they should be allowed? Why didn't some one come and teach the wretched creatures to wash their faces, and keep their houses clean? What else did all householders pay church-rate and poor-rate for, but that such excrescences as these on the face of the earth should be avoided?

It was somebody's duty to see to it, clearly, but it did not at all appear to Mr. Ensdell that it was his. The only thing for him to do was, if possible, to induce his model to leave this foul, ill-smelling place, where her beauty would be ruined, and the developing process, which had been going on so satisfactorily, might come to a stand-still altogether. If he could only induce her to look at things

in a rational light, and leave her mother to the charge of any of the neighbours, he would pay them well for seeing to the old woman, and place her at once where there would be some chance of her mind ripening and her manners refining. But to have her come from this place to his studio, now that he had once seen what Swamp Town really was, he felt would be more than he could bear. He should smell the dust, and think of the cinder-heaps whenever he saw her now, if she remained here; and how should he be able to paint her as Rebecca or Juliet, if he should know that but an hour before she might been receiving the gallantries of a costermonger, or exchanging tender confidences with one of the strapping Dulcineas who had eyed him so curiously as he passed their doors. No, at any and every cost Meg must be got away. At any cost—well, that would be a few pounds to him—perhaps a

great many—the developing process, as he should like to carry it on, might be an expensive one, but it must be carried on, nevertheless. And the cost to Meg—well, the escape from the charge of her mother, which, no doubt, she would rejoice in, and the giving some time and thought to the perfecting herself as his model. Further cost?—well, Mr. Ensdell did not care to think too much of that—time alone could show what that might be.

He was now in Pleasant Road. Of course, as it bore that name, it was, if anything, a few shades more squalid in its wretchedness than any other part of Swamp Town; and before he had gone many yards he came up to Prospect Place, which was a row of six small tenements, on the centre one of which was painted the name they collectively claimed. The houses were not numbered, so there was no telling which was No. 2; but as

the corner house of Prospect Place was a small greengrocer's, with a little chandlery business attached, he went in there and asked for the house he wanted, and also if a Mrs. Blount lived there.

"It was only next door," the woman of the shop said, looking at him a little curiously; "and Mrs. Blount was there, ill a-bed though, and not likely to leave it."

"She has a daughter, has she not?" asked Mr. Ensdell. "Is she able to attend to her?"

He wished to learn something about Meg from her neighbours—the girl had always been so silent and reticent about herself. It was not, perhaps, just what a gentleman should have done; but Mr. Ensdell wanted to know as much about his model's antecedents as possible. It would assist the developing process.

"Yes, the girl was with her, and she'd

nothing else to do but see to her mother, now Joe Blake and the baby had died. She was a good daughter, that she was, though the old woman was a bit tryin' at times."

"Joe Blake and the baby!" Well, what else could he have expected from a girl living in Swamp Town? But they were both out of the way now, which was the best thing for all parties—Meg herself especially. It certainly would have been very awkward if Joe had lived—he would have been much more in the way than the old woman was likely to be. Then Mr. Ensdell left the little dirty shop, and the woman in it conceived a respect for Mrs. Blount such as she had never before experienced. There might be something, after all, in her reminiscences of better days gone by, if such a gentleman as this came to inquire after her. Perhaps he was one of her relations, who had come to see after her, now she was ill.

Well, it might be a good thing for Meg if it was so, especially as the old woman wasn't likely to last much longer to be a trouble to her.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ensdell was rapping with his knuckles at the door of Number Two. There was no knocker; in all Swamp Town you would not have found such a mark of civilization; and he might have knocked some time—for the woman of the house, who occupied the lower apartments, was out, and Meg was upstairs with her mother—had it not been for the woman from the green-grocer's shop, who came outside, and called loudly, "Meg—Meg Blount, come down, and open the door. Here's a gentleman as wants to see you!"

"Meg *Blount*," and the writer of the letter he had received that morning spoke of his pupil as Miss Blount; and yet there had been a Joe Blake and a baby. Mr. Ensdell

drew his own conclusions from these facts, but they did not make him at all less disposed to do his best for the improvement of his model. Of course, if Joe had been alive, it might have been another matter; but fortunately Joe was out of the way.

Presently the door opened, and Meg stood before him. She looked pale and heavy-eyed, as if she had been up all night, which, in truth, was the case; but pleased to see him, although surprised.

"It is very good of you to come, sir," she said; "I—I'm so sorry I wasn't able to leave mother; and I don't know when I shall be, either, she's that bad; but I'll come —indeed I will, sir, as soon as ever I'm able."

"I hope so, Meg," replied Mr. Ensdell; "but can't I speak to you indoors? Have you no place you could ask me into for a few minutes?"

It was not very pleasant to be standing in the street, up to his ankles in dust, with the woman from the greengrocer's shop listening to every word, and half a dozen urchins of either sex gathered round. Meg hesitated, then she said,

"Would you mind coming up, sir? Mother's fast asleep—the doctor's given her some stuff to make her—we shan't wake her."

Ensdell followed Meg through the wretchedly dirty lower room, with all the sordid litter of poverty and unthrift about it, up the steep, narrow stairs, and on to the small landing, from which two doors opened. At one of these he saw a man's head protruding. It was dirty, unshaved, and with a small black pipe in the mouth—a pipe evidently unused to the consumption of any but the coarsest and rankest tobacco. Ensdell remembered the aroma that had hung

around his letter, and concluded the head must belong to the writer. Was Meg then his pupil, and had she already tried to improve herself? There was some hope of her if she could do it under such disadvantages; but, still, it was all the more incumbent on him to remove her from these associations. Fancy the owner of *that* head having anything to do with Meg's development!

Meg opened the door of her own apartment and took him in. It was an agreeable surprise to Ensdell, after the squalor of the room below, and the scenes through which he had passed. The room, at any rate, was clean, and the broken vase had flowers in it, while Meg's improved circumstances had enabled her to purchase two cheap plaster figures to accompany it. On a little table were some books—Meg had got beyond Mavor's Spelling by this time—and a

pen and ink, and a copy-book, open where she had been writing while her mother slept. Ensdell looked at the writing, and took up the books—a Webster's Reader and a Darnell's Grammar. She was evidently studying in earnest—meeting his wishes half-way. If he only once got her from Swamp Town, he should find his work easy enough.

"So you've begun to learn to write, Meg?" he said. "Who teaches you?"

"Mr. Twiss, in the next room; and I was getting on well with my reading, and he'd just begun to teach me grammar, when mother took bad. I can't leave her to go to him, though he is so near, so I must give that up for a bit."

"But couldn't you find anyone else to nurse your mother, Meg? I want you to come to me, you know."

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"Mother's queer, she is, now she's ill, and she never got on to say well with the neighbours. No, I couldn't leave her, unless I was downright obliged, and I've got enough money to go on with."

"Oh! as to the money, Meg, I'll stand the expenses; only don't go wasting your time, and spoiling your looks, by stopping in here. What does the doctor say about your mother? How long is she likely to be ill?"

Meg looked very grave.

"Not for long, I'm afraid. He says she'll never get no better. I shan't be hindered long, sir, from coming to you."

The bed in which Mrs. Blount lay was against one side of the room, and a curtain being drawn before it, screened its occupant from Mr. Ensdell's eyes; but Mrs. Blount had not been so soundly asleep as Meg had thought, for she was now heard exclaiming,

fretfully, "Who's that, Meg?—who have you got gossiping and hindering you, when you ought to be looking to me?"

Meg went up to her.

"It's the gentleman, mother, from Courtmain Street, come to see if I could go to be painted. I've just been telling him I can't leave you while you're bad."

"Why don't he come and ask me if I can spare you?—it wouldn't be more than civil. But it's a long time since any one thought it worth while to be civil to me. You're as bad as the rest, Meg, or you'd have brought him to me as soon as he came."

Mr. Ensdell went up to the bedside. Mrs. Blount was looking flushed and fretful —so flushed, that few eyes but a medical man's could have seen how seriously ill she was. She was a handsome woman still, although drink and the hard life she had led made her look old before her time. Not

much like Meg; hers had always been a beauty of a coarser, bolder kind, and the hair, which was now thickly streaked with grey, had been a light brown, instead of the glossy black of Meg's. The eyes, too, were unlike. Mrs. Blount's were of a pale greyish blue, while Meg's were almost as dark as her hair. But it was the type of the face wherein the difference most consisted. Meg's was of a higher kind altogether—even in its dreamiest languor you could detect the latent soul, that only needed rousing; while in Mrs. Blount's you would be troubled to find traces of a soul at all. In her best days she could have been nothing but a handsome animal, and have woke no higher emotions than an animal perfect in its kind may rouse.

Mr. Ensdell was very courteous as he bent over her, and inquired, with an air of the utmost interest, after her health. But

then, to be courteous, was a habit of his, and distasteful as Meg's mother was to him, as being a hindrance to Meg's advancement, and the progress of his picture, still it cost him no effort now to make his inquiries appear as if dictated by his solicitude for her well-being.

He was very much annoyed with her for waking just then—it would be impossible for him to persuade Meg to leave her mother, when that mother was awake to overhear every word he said; but still, as she *was* awake, there was nothing for it but to make the best of matters, and be as civil and conciliatory as possible. He might have the good fortune to find her asleep the next time.

Mrs. Blount was flattered by his politeness, and entered into a long catalogue of her ailments, breaking off in the midst to scold Meg for not giving the gentleman a chair. Then Mr. Ensdell had to sit down and

listen to the melancholy recital—with the hot July sun pouring into the room, and the voice of the sufferer growing more and more querulous as she proceeded with her tale. She had a new listener, and she was resolved to make the most of him. He was too rare a luxury to be let slip easily.

It was a great bore the having to sit there in that close, poor little room, with the hot sun pouring on his back, and the dust through which he had waded half choking him, as it rose from his feet to his head. He smelled that foul black dust—should he ever forget the smell?—it was working into the very pores of his skin—should he ever be able to purify himself from it? Would that dreadful woman never have done with the long string of her complaints, and release him at last. What a price he was paying for the development of his model!

At last Mrs. Blount grew tired, and closed

her eyes. Then Mr. Ensdell rose to take his leave. Meg followed him to the street-door, and he took the opportunity of urging upon her to resume the sittings, and employ some one else to nurse her mother; but Meg was firm.

"No one ever will bear with her like me —she's that contrary; and it won't be for long, you know, sir."

And Meg looked up at him with a pitiful smile, and the tears in her eyes—she actually cared for the woman upstairs!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHAPEL OF EASE.

THERE was not much society at Summerly—at least, not much that Mr. Stanton thought worthy of the name; but then his ideas of society were a little out of date at the present day—he was a gentleman of many descents himself, and he could not understand gentlemen of two or three, or of no descent at all. There were a few families of long standing in the neighbouring parishes, and with these Nelly and himself chiefly associated. He did his duty, as he conceived it, however, in Summerly; gave away coals and blankets at Christmas, subscribed to the Clothing Club, and the

little local charities, patronized the Curate, and was on very friendly terms with the Rector. It was his duty, as Master of the Oaks, and the personage of chief importance in Summerly, to do all these things; and the duty not being a very difficult one, he performed it. With the Rector, indeed, the duty took the form of a pleasure, for Mr. Vernon was the only person in the parish, with the exception of himself, to whom, in his heart, Mr. Stanton accorded the degree of gentleman.

There was no mistake about Mr. Vernon's pedigree. The very name was enough, in Mr. Stanton's opinion, to support his claims to it, but every one knew the branch of the Vernons from which the old Rector came; and his right to the imposing crest with which he sealed his letters. Mr. Stanton, with a proud humility, was content to own himself second in the matter of family to the Rector.

He thought a great deal more of the matter than the old gentleman did himself. *He* was quiet, simple, and unostentatious enough—a good man in his way, and a clever one; but his goodness was not of the sort most calculated to benefit others, nor his talents of the kind likely to be most useful in a country village. He did his duty, too, after his own fashion, in Summerly, as Mr. Stanton did his; and his duty, even according to his own lights, was not an easy one; but still, when he had performed it to the best of his power, it was a poor day's work after all.

Summerly Church and its Rector had a good deal in common. The church was a picturesque building enough outside, standing a little way from the village street, or rather road, which wound its steep way along from the little pretentious chapel of ease a mile and a half above the church,

to the bustling town of Milford half a mile below it. There was the village pump in front, a favourite resort for gossips, and a standing sign of the deficiencies of household comfort in the surrounding cottages. Inside, the church had a neglected, uncared-for look, with all the faults and little of the beauty belonging to the old time in which it had been erected. High pews, where those who liked could sleep comfortably, undisturbed by the censorious looks of those around; bare whitewashed walls, small-paned windows, some of which had once boasted of stained glass, but that had long since all been broken, and its place filled by colourless material; so old, so bare, so ugly, that to have likened it to a conventicle or a barn would have seemed almost a compliment.

Like his church, the Rector was out of date. His faults and inefficiencies were

around his letter, and concluded the head must belong to the writer. Was Meg then his pupil, and had she already tried to improve herself? There was some hope of her if she could do it under such disadvantages; but, still, it was all the more incumbent on him to remove her from these associations. Fancy the owner of *that* head having anything to do with Meg's development!

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very critical either as to their delivery, or the matter contained in them. Such a congregation would know better than to criticise its betters.

So James Vernon took to the Gospel instead of the Law, and in so doing took the first wrong step which set all his life awry for ever after. He was a poor preacher, and a worse pastor. He had the best intentions in the world, and the worst way of carrying them out. He wished the poorer members of his flock to lead good, orderly lives—be pure, honest, sober, send their children to school, and bring them to church; but how to set about realizing these desirable ends was more than he could tell. He visited the cottages, and was at a loss for words to say when he got there; he told the people they ought to come to church, but it was out of his power to do anything to attract them thither; his sermons might have been

very good, had they been audible, and delivered to a congregation as well versed in ecclesiastical matters as himself; but they were infinitely too good for the village folks he had to deal with. Kind, courteous, and tolerant as he was, he was out of place in Summerly. His proper position would have been in chambers in the Temple, or, better still, in the rooms of a fellow at College. It might have been well had he never left the walls of his Alma Mater—he was too thoroughly at home in his library to be at home anywhere else, and in Summerly there was much less need of a profound scholar than of a busy parish priest; there was something more needed than a man who possessed the passive virtues only. However well-meaning a man Mr. Vernon might be, there were more souls than his own to be saved in the parish, and more work needed doing in it, with its hundreds

of heavy, half-awakened Saxon natures than he could ever cope with.

But the crying sin of the Rector, in the eyes of the High Church party at least, was his tolerance of Dissenters. He was positively civil to them—had called on the Dissenting minister when he first came to the neighbourhood, as he might have done on any other gentleman. Nor did the matter rest there. He was fond of children, and petted Mrs. Harley's two little girls whenever he met them, sent her presents of game, and would occasionally drop in for a chat with her. I think nothing that he could have done would more completely have alienated the minds of the High Church party from him. He had much better, as far as they were concerned, have broken any one of the Ten Commandments. There might be forgiveness for a murderer, but how could there be any for a Churchman

and a priest who forgot himself so far as to recognise a Dissenting minister as his neighbour and fellow-worker.

In his heart, perhaps, poor Mr. Vernon felt that the Dissenting minister was a worker to better purpose than himself, and was glad, indirectly, to atone for his own shortcomings by such few acts of courtesy and kindness as he could show to a labourer more worthy than he; or it might be only the innate courtesy of his nature, which would not suffer him to think evil of a man for holding views opposed to his own, or permit him to show discourtesy to those whose position he was sure exposed them to too much already. There was a latent chivalry in the old gentleman's nature which prompted him to give what countenance he might to a man whose lines had by no means fallen in pleasant places when they fell in Summerly; to be gracious to children and

women, even if they dwelt in a chapel house; and to recognise a lady, and give her her due meed of courtesy, let her hold what tenets she would, and worship where she might.

A good man, and a true gentleman, but who all his life was suffering from and expiating his own fatal weakness at the commencement of his career, and the false position into which he had been thrust by family expediency.

And, unhappily, he could not suffer alone. The wrong he had done, the false step he had taken, must be atoned for by others besides himself. The wrong man in the wrong place can nowhere do worse harm than when he is a pastor unfitted for his work.

Years ago, Mr. Vernon had taken unto himself a wife, with some dim idea that in so doing he should secure not only a helpmate for himself, but a valuable assistant in the

parish work; who might, to some extent, atone for his own incapacities for it. She might look after the schools—a thing to which he knew himself quite unequal, his only notion of managing children being a system of persistent spoiling; whilst he felt that the youngest child in the school was more than a match for him if it came to a question of excuses for non-attendance. It must have been a stupid urchin indeed, and the Rector knew it, who could not find an excuse plausible enough for him. And the charities—those charities the judicious administration of which he despaired of, knowing how readily he was imposed upon, could be dispensed much better by a lady. Women were keener and quicker in such things—could detect waste and unthrift in those village housewives who had always a tale ready to blind him with; and even the church itself would be better cared for. He

had an idea that cobwebs and dirt were not the fittest adjuncts of a place of worship; but he had really very little more notion of how it should be kept in proper order than he had of regulating the economy of his own home. He had installed the gardener's wife as housekeeper in the one, and the sexton was expected to look after the other. Both housekeeper and sexton failed in their duty —home and church were equally dirty and neglected; and the Rector had an uncomfortable consciousness that they were so, and a great hope that when he brought a wife home to Summerly, things would be managed very differently.

In a little time his hopes were realized. He had chosen his wife more wisely than his profession, and Mrs. Vernon seemed likely to be a very efficient helpmate. But things were not to go well with the Rector. Within a year after marriage, Mrs. Vernon

fell into a state of ill-health, which before long confined her to two rooms of the Rectory, and put a stop for ever to the career of active usefulness upon which she had entered. The Rector was a patient and a tender husband, though he had married more on account of his parish than himself. He spared neither cost nor care—first in the hope of restoring his wife to health, and next to lighten the burden of her invalidism as much as possible. But by degrees he drifted back into the old careless track, from which the influence of his wife had led him for a time. The sexton had his own way in the church, which looked more dreary and neglected than ever; the children stayed away from the schools whenever it suited their own inclinations or their mothers' that they should do so; the beer-shops flourished and multiplied, and the charities were dispensed with as little discrimination as ever.

There was not much to choose between those who needed them, the Rector thought, as far as deserving went—and we should all come badly off if we only had our due. After all, it was more a question of who needed help the most than of who merited it. Who was he, that he should judge too closely the shortcomings of his poorer brethren?

So dirt and drunkenness reigned unchecked in Summerly. The girls bore nameless children, and nursed them at their cottage doors with no more sense of wrong-doing than if they had dwelt in Swamp Town, for all their attendance as children at the National and Sunday schools. The men spent half their earnings in beer, and the women quarrelled with them—which was not surprising, but did not make matters more attractive at home—scolded their children, gossiped at their doors, let their houses and themselves go equally uncared for, and vied

with each other as to the extent to which they could most readily impose upon the Rector's benevolence.

It was all wrong; he felt and knew it, but he was powerless to set the wrong right. It was not in him.

The family from the Oaks always went to the old church of Summerly. The servants sat in a pew below, and Mr. Stanton, his daughter, and Mrs. Winthrop, in a kind of box opposite the pulpit, about twelve feet from the ground, and to which a small staircase outside the building led. The curtains were generally half drawn; Mr. Stanton said it was not pleasant to be stared at by the people below, and Mrs. Winthrop agreed with him. So in the hot summer days, while the Rector wearily stumbled through his sermons, Mr. Stanton nodded on one side of his pew, and Mrs. Winthrop dozed on the other, Nelly, the while, thinking her

own thoughts, and weaving her own dreams. It was just a quiet time for the purpose; the Rector's voice, while it lulled her father and Mrs. Winthrop to repose, soothed her into a meditative mood, which there was nothing here to interrupt as at home. No cat to tease, no dog to chase, no flowers to gather —nothing but the curtained and well-cushioned pew and the drowsy hum of the Rector's voice as he quoted from the Fathers, and waded on to his sixthlys and his seventhlys.

Nelly would have liked to have gone to St. Paul's, the chapel of ease at the further extremity of Summerly. Since the new Curate came there, she had heard much of the improvement in the singing, the chanting the responses, the decorations of the altar, and the superior style altogether in which the modern St. Paul's managed matters, compared with the ancient St. Mary's.

Only she would have grieved to desert the old Rector. He was one of her very earliest friends, had spoiled her from a child, and did his best to spoil her now, only in another manner.

The singing, the flowers, the responses, were very attractive at St. Paul's; but Nelly would not have liked to desert the Rector for them. Mr. Stanton, too, would have been reluctant to have gone to St. Paul's. It was a longer drive for the horses—that was one thing, and the road was up hill all the way; and besides, there was the old family pew at St. Mary's, with its solemn dignity of cushions and curtains. St. Paul's had nothing to give him like that, there being little to distinguish the seats from one another, but their respective nearness to the pulpit. And St. Paul's was new, and since Mr. Stanton had left Bohemianism behind him, he had eschewed newness as much as

possible. But the people who assembled at St. Paul's were new likewise,—stock-brokers, wealthy tradesmen, and men of a similar class, who had settled at Summerly with their families, and went to and from London daily, to follow their avocations.

Mr. Stanton shrank from associating even when he worshipped with such as these. The old church, with its unique family pew appropriated to himself, with the farmers and the small tradesmen of the village below, was far more congenial to him. He was a grand seigneur there. At St. Paul's they might not have been so ready to recognise his seigneurship—there were those amongst its congregation who might have thought their annual thousands, even although earned in commerce, entitled them to rank as his equal, and brush shoulders with him. But he was civil to the Curate, as it behoved a gentleman of his standing to

be, and Mr. Marsh was, he said, "a respectable man, who knew his place," and whom, therefore, Mr. Stanton honoured by asking once a year to dinner.

Mr. Stanton was not a gentleman who would have called a Curate a "respectable man," without good reasons for so doing. But Mr. Marsh struck him as that, and nothing more. He was well-behaved; but it was not the behaviour of a gentleman accustomed to mix on equal terms with others; and he was not at his ease in a drawing-room —at least, not such a drawing-room as that of the Oaks. Mr. Marsh dressed trimly, and was punctilious in his observance of social etiquettes—(as far as he knew them)—and the Rector flung his clothes on, wore them till they were threadbare, and, with all his courtesy, took things more easily than the Curate; but there was no question that they had been reared in very different schools, and

while the merest tyro in such matters would have had no hesitation in writing Mr. Vernon down at once as gentleman, there might have been some hesitation in according that title to the Curate—but there was no question as to his respectability.

Mr. Marsh had made a great stir in Summerly. The last Curate had been inclined to take matters as easily as the Rector, so things at the upper end of the village had been as bad as at the lower—worse even; for the Rector's kindliness, although often imposed upon, still had some indirect influence for good upon the rough men, and their slatternly wives, whom he befriended; and the late Curate had not been remarkable for rivalling him in that particular. The ladies around Summerly Common hoped for great things from Mr. Marsh. He was not long in impressing them with a profound opinion of his piety, and they hoped for much from a

"pious clergyman;" and when, as time went on, they found his piety was of the "high" order, they became very sanguine in their expectations. Life fifteen miles from town is apt to stagnate at times, and there is a little pleasant excitement about High Churchism, which tends to vary its monotony agreeably to childless wives and young ladies whose hopes of marriage have begun to fade. They were all very ready to co-operate with Mr. Marsh, and looked upon his advent as an indescribable blessing.

He was not married, either—always a desirable thing in a Curate, especially if of the Ritualistic class. His appearance was a little peculiar—the thick black beard, the large features, the heavy mass of dark hair, and the florid complexion, presenting a *tout ensemble* not altogether in accordance with the preconceived notions some of the ladies had of curates. But they got over that; the

beard soon became quite a point in his favour, they speculated as to whether he would let it grow, and the ultimate length to which it might attain. The Rector was always cleanly shaved. They were inclined to like the Curate's beard out of sheer opposition; besides, if he *did* go as far as some of his brethren had done in priestly attire, the beard would be so admirably in keeping. Father Ignatius and his brethren wore beards. Well, they wouldn't like him to go as far as Father Ignatius, who, they thought, eschewed matrimony—but still, how well that beard, if he did, would go with the gown and girdle.

The lower classes did not equal their betters in reverence for the beard. Some said he wore it to save shaving, others because he was a converted Jew; but they kept these remarks to themselves, and as the ladies all appeared to think so well of

Mr. Marsh, why, they professed to think well too—at any rate within the ladies' hearing. Altogether, Mr. Marsh bid fair to be a popular person in Summerly.

Only the Rector regretted the choice he had made. The Rector, who, let his deficiencies be what they might, had still that rare gift, common-sense. He had not seen much good come of Ritualism, and was not inclined to put much faith in it. He had hoped to find in Mr. Marsh an active worker in the parish, a man who would perform the pastoral duty efficiently, preach tolerable sermons, and supplement his own short-comings. He had little idea how far his Curate's views were opposed to his own, when he appointed him to St. Paul's.

Mr. Marsh had held a wise reticence on the point, and the Rector, if he had been called on to define to which of the many sections of the Church he belonged, would,

I am inclined to think, have given him his place among the Broad school. Not so broad as Colenso—with all the good old gentleman's tolerance, he shook his head whenever he named the Bishop of Natal—certainly not quite on a par with Maurice and Kingsley—but still endued with a pleasant gentlemanly liberalism, that perhaps was the most desirable state of feeling now-a-days, and most likely, the Rector imagined, to render him acceptable to his congregation. And now here he was, preaching doctrines which the old Rector held in utter abhorrence, and inoculating everybody in the congregation with the views of High Anglicanism.

And the disease is so catching! Fancy-work, potichomanie, croquet, are nothing to it. There is a delicious excitement about it all, to which even flirting must give way. Besides, flirting and High Churchism can be

combined when an unmarried Curate inculcates the doctrines of the latter; and though Mr. Marsh was eight-and-thirty, and not of the pale, interesting type of Curate that ladies most admire, they were not disposed to be too critical in Summerly—a Curate was a curate, after all, even if robust and rubicund, and the elderly demoiselles of the place, and the women who had never heard a child's prattle in their houses, were disposed to make the most of him; he did so much towards filling up the dreary vacuum of their aimless lives.

Sunday became quite a pleasant day to look forward to. Some of the more enthusiastic of the fair devotees actually practised their genuflexions before the glass. It was not enough to kneel, but they ought to do it gracefully, especially those whose dresses were worth the exhibiting. There was a decided rise in the dressmakers' bills after

Mr. Marsh's advent in Summerly. Nothing shews a rich silk off to such advantage as the folds it falls into around the kneeling figure. Humility, judiciously attired, may be made to wear a very queenly semblance. Then there was the pleasure of practising the responses; some of them met at each other's houses to do that—Mr. Marsh, of course, presiding. It was on these occasions that he was in all his glory as a Curate —petted, flattered, and appealed to—a Pope in a small way, and happier than a Pope, inasmuch as he had the inestimable privilege of hoping to marry some one of the fair creatures around him not yet appropriated, and sufficiently endowed.

There was some earnestness and honesty, too, in the man—as much as there can be with one who is nominally an adherent of one form of worship, and doing his utmost to supplant it by another. He believed that

he was doing the best thing for his church —the best for his congregation—in taking the line he did; and perhaps we must not judge him too hardly if he did not forget that he might be doing the best for himself. As a mere Curate, content to jog along the old beaten paths, preach commonplace sermons, and perform commonplace duties, he would have taken a very secondary position to that which he aspired to, and to which he sincerely believed his ordination entitled him. It was a great thing to be a priest, and hold more than life and death in his hands—the power of absolving and confessing sinners. After all, what was the power of king or kaiser to that?—to the mysterious authority delegated by God himself unto His ministrants before the altar?

The possession of these mysterious powers was a great thing; but there was enough of the earth, earthy, about Mr. Marsh, to make

him also value the position to which that power entitled him. A man sprung, as he had done, from the lower middle-classes, would attach more importance to that than one born in the upper ranks of society. Here was a ready means, if not of exactly entering those ranks, of taking a footing independent of, and above them all. There was no household where, as a priest, he might not enter as an equal, and something more; no woman who ought not to feel honoured by the offer of his hand, no layman who would have a right to count himself his superior.

Mr. Marsh did not put these pretensions forth plainly—in fact, he had a little awkwardness and diffidence to contend with. It might be all very well to know his position; but still he did not feel quite so easy about it when visiting the Oaks, and he had a dim idea that Mr. Stanton would have

opened his eyes rather widely, and shut his doors very closely on him for the future, had he asserted it, or presumed to consider that it entitled him to become a candidate for the hand of his daughter. Indeed, in that case Mr. Marsh had an uncomfortable consciousness that he would have been shown to the door at once, and in a very summary manner.

No, things were only ripening now, not ripe yet, for the priesthood to stand forth in all its dignity and power. All that he could do was to exert himself to the utmost in hastening the process, labouring with all his might in the little corner of the world which had been assigned him as his special vineyard.

Sorely those labours grieved the Rector. On saint days and festivals the bells were ringing, and St. Paul's opened for the attendance of the neighbouring ladies, who

would have been much better at home, the old gentleman thought, than encouraging Mr. Marsh in wasting time that might have been so much better spent. Couldn't he go amongst the poor? Was there nothing else for him to do than practise these senseless mummeries, which were so many excrescences on the grandly simple form of worship the Church enjoined? He might as well have been play-actor at once—ten times sooner, for an actor might be an honest man, but what could be said of a clergyman of the Church of England who was three-quarters of the way on the road to Rome? The Rector's soul chafed within him. There were the poor, too, those poor whom he had hoped a younger and more efficient man than himself would do so much for, complaining that if they went to Chapel the ladies gave them tracts upon the sin of Nonconformity, in which Dissenters were

spoken of in very unpleasant terms, while Mr. Marsh withdrew the light of his countenance altogether from them.

In all his life the Rector had never once made a distinction between the Church-goer and Dissenter—indeed, in Summerly, as far as the lower classes were concerned, it would have been difficult to do so,—the few who attended a place of worship at all going to Chapel—which the Rector himself hardly wondered at; he had a dim idea that Mr. Harley understood their spiritual needs far better than he did himself. But there was no such tolerance to be found amongst Mr. Marsh and his lady visitors. To stop away from Church was, after all, only a sin of omission, for which a great many excuses could be found—the want of a Sunday coat, a cross baby, a fit of rheumatism; but to go to Chapel was a sin beyond forgiveness—a flagrant piece of insubordination

against the powers that be—treason against spiritual authority, for which no punishment short of a cutting off from all good offices and charities would suffice. So some of the better-class poor turned mutinous and insolent, called Mr. Marsh hard names, and vowed that if the Chapel were shut up altogether, they would never darken the doors of the Church; while those of a lower stamp attended occasionally, and took good care to turn their attendance to profitable account afterwards; adding to their other vices one from which, till now, they had at least been free—that of hypocrisy.

Altogether, the Rector felt that he had made a grievous blunder in putting Mr. Marsh into the curacy—a blunder likely to be little less disastrous in its consequences than was the one that thirty years before he had made when he himself entered the Church. Both blunders were irremediable

now—the curacy was perpetual, and there was nothing for himself but to abide by the vocation he had adopted.

And while Mr. Marsh was intoning his prayers, swinging his censers, and attiring himself in the last new thing in ecclesiastical millinery, that the fingers of his fair devotees had furnished, there was one girl in the parish asking if, amidst all these symbols and ceremonies, she could find that which in all her seeming careless happiness she had been asking for—the purpose for which her life was given, and how best to lighten the darkened, wretched lives which she had caught glimpses of around her. Would there be no practical outcome from it all?—no solution to the riddle of her own abundance and others' poverty, her own smooth path and the troubled ones of others, which perplexed and distressed her?

And there was another girl, miles away,

waiting by a sick-bed, from which the sufferer would never rise, who, while the Church was disputing and differing amongst itself, had been overlooked by all its members—who had grown up to womanhood as very a heathen as if she had never heard the sound of the church bells—who had never even learned how sacred a thing her womanhood was, and so had lost its purity, and desecrated its sacredness, before she knew the worth of either; and who was waiting—waiting now for the day to come when a pauper grave would enclose for ever the mother who bore her, as it had enclosed her child and its father.

No hope, no hereafter, for one more than the other. Nothing when the grave had closed, but the thick black clods upon it. The sun might shine, and the sky wear its brightest azure, but sunshine and blue ether would only seem a mockery to the eyes that

had never learned to look beyond the clouds, and to the heart that thought beneath the clods lay all.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. BLOUNT'S LAST GOOD NIGHT.

MRS. BLOUNT lingered on. The parish doctor said she would never get better; but Meg was not satisfied with his verdict, and called in another. She had money enough to go on with, as she had told Mr. Ensdell, and she was determined that her mother should want for nothing. She had not been the best of mothers, perhaps, but Meg was not the girl to think of that at such a time as this; besides, after all, Mrs. Blount was no worse than her neighbours, and if she had scolded Meg, and kept a tight hand over her, she had never struck or ill-used her even in her least sober mo-

ments—and there were not many mothers in Swamp Town of whom that could be said.

Mrs. Blount herself had an idea that she was going, but she said little on the subject, being, indeed, too weak to do so. Once the clergyman came of whom I have spoken, and Meg, who had never yet met him, wondered at his words, and the meaning of his visit. He addressed Mrs. Blount as a sinner, which made Meg angry; she was not going to have her mother called names, and felt inclined to tell him so; and he spoke a great deal about the Church, and the sheep that had strayed from the fold—all of which was sheerly unintelligible to Meg, whose one idea of the Church was that of a great stone building, with closed doors all the week through, and to which well-dressed people went on a Sunday. She had never been in one herself, but she was sure it was not a place for sheep—did

he wish to say that her mother was one?—and what did he mean about a fold?

Meg sat sullenly by the fire all the time he was speaking, and made up her mind he should not come in again, "worryin' her mother like that."

He meant well, too, only it was almost impossible for him to realize the utter ignorance with which he had to contend. He had his set, dry phrases and formulas, which were quite unintelligible to Meg; and her mother, who had heard something like them in the old days, when she attended Sunday-school, had forgotten their meaning now, if, indeed, she had ever understood it.

The Reverend Thomas Brown was not exactly adapted for his work, and made little way amongst the people of Swamp Town; still, it was something to have him there at all—a slight improvement upon the utter neglect of the place, which till now

had been the rule. If only the Reverend Thomas would have used plain words, and made sure that his hearers understood their meaning, before he commenced discoursing of the mysteries of things unseen, and to them incomprehensible.

The fact was, to wake such souls as those of Meg and her companions, he had need to learn a language in which to address them. If he would only have given them milk, not meat—have been content to instruct them in the A B C of Christianity at first, he might have done some good. As it was, half his words fell on idle, inattentive ears, simply because they could not comprehend them. If they could only have understood his message, no fear but they would have received it gladly. As it was, the message passed unheeded, because it was *not* understood.

Once or twice the ladies from the soup-

kitchen came to inquire after Mrs. Blount, but Meg would not allow them to see her. She had not been favourably impressed by "the parson," and her mother wanted quiet, she said; if she could give her nothing else, she would give her that.

It might have been well for Meg if these ladies had begun their ministrations earlier. As it was, she had cast her lot in with Joe some time before they came to Swamp Town, and in one way or another had been prevented from coming into contact with them. They would have done her infinitely more good than the Rev. Thomas, their way and his of going to work being rather different. The Rev. Thomas was paid by the Church Missionary Society, and looked a little askance on the ladies, who were of no particular denomination whatever, comprising in their number half a dozen different shades of opinion, from Broad Church

down to what the Rev. Thomas in his heart regarded as the natural and inevitable termination of such latitudinarianism, and termed, not too reverently, Socinianism. They were doing their work well, however, but they were too few for the labour, and their very unsectarianism was against them. People liked better to co-operate with an acknowledged leader, and feel some ism or other was the mainspring of their efforts. It was not enough to work for Christ alone. They must give some religious denomination or other the credit of their good deeds.

All the same, if these good Samaritans had been a little earlier in the field, they might have given another colouring to Meg's life.

Mr. Ensdell came every other day, to see how his model's mother was progressing. He had found it quite hopeless to attempt to persuade Meg to leave her, so he waded

through the dust of Swamp Town, and bought sometimes grapes, and sometimes flowers; and the invalid was very much pleased with the attention, and seemed to think that her merits were at last being appreciated. Mr. Ensdell would have given her more substantial help, but when he offered to do so, Meg had civilly declined it. She had enough as yet, she told him, and she wouldn't go begging for her mother as long as she could help it. But she was very grateful for the flowers—they lightened up the dull little room, and did something to deaden the all-pervading odour of the dust. The grapes, too, were so beautiful, Meg felt her heart dilate within her as she looked upon them. It was so kind of a gentleman like Mr. Ensdell to think of bringing them. She often found her thoughts turning from the flowers and the fruit to their donor.

It seemed a relief to have him to think of now. The long attendance by that sick bed was very monotonous, and there was not the love to lighten it that there had been when she kept watch by Joe. True, she was spared the agony of that time; instead there was now only a dull dead sense of pain, when she thought of the hour so near at hand when she would be quite alone in the world. A cold, bleak feeling of loneliness oppressed her when she looked forward,—it was a little comfort to think of Mr. Ensdell then. In the midst of the dull drudgery of her daily life, it was pleasant to dwell upon his modulated voice, his white hands and careful dress.

Meg had never thought him handsome, but she had found herself recalling, with a strange pleasure, his refined easy bearing, his tall slender figure, and the light brown waving hair of which he was so proud. His

coming was something to look forward to—the day seemed as if it would never come to an end when he did not make his appearance in the sick-room. She did not care for him, she told herself so, "only as a poor girl might for a gentleman who had been very kind to her"—certainly not as she had cared for Joe; but she found her mind running on him every hour of the day.

Only her mind, however, which had so little else to fill it; as to her heart, that was still with Joe and baby.

Mrs. Blount made no comment on Mr. Ensdell's repeated visits. Indeed, she was too weak to do more than show her pleasure at his gifts; and day by day the languor and torpor increased, till at last she could only open her eyes when she heard his voice, and give a faint smile of welcome.

How long she was dying! And, unlike Charles the Second, she was quite uncon-

scious of the inconvenience she was causing. Mr. Ensdell was always the same—bland, smiling, and sympathetic, but he felt Mrs. Blount was very much in the way, and almost despaired of seeing his Rebecca ever finished. At last he resolved to leave London for a few days—the waiting would seem a little less wearisome if he were out of sight of his picture, and he might come back and find matters happily terminated. He did not tell Meg this when he announced his intention of going to the seaside, simply saying that he did not feel very well, and should not be gone more than a week or two.

The girl turned pale as he spoke, which Mr. Ensdell was not very sorry to see—it was clear that she would miss him. He slipped some gold into her hand.

"You must take this, Meg; I shouldn't like you to want for anything while I'm gone."

Then Meg burst into tears.

"I wouldn't take it, but it's a truth, my last shilling's gone; but you've paid me so well, and you're so kind, it seems robbing like to take it from you."

"Robbing! Nonsense, Meg; you shall give me a few extra sittings when I come back, and that will make all square. Good-bye, my girl; keep up your spirits, and don't lose your good looks."

Then he was gone, and Meg put the money into her little purse, saying—

"Well, he's very good, and a gentleman, every inch of him."

The next day Mrs. Blount seemed better. She was able to speak, which she had not done for days; and when Meg gave her the stimulants which the doctor had ordered, her eyes brightened, and she almost looked her old self again.

"Meg," she said, "I've got something to

say. Come near, girl, for I can't speak loud. I've not been quite as good a mother as I might—things has been against me all my life, somehow; but it's my belief you was honestly born—it wasn't my fault if you weren't. How was a poor creature like me to know all the ins and outs of the law? It was a shame for any gentleman to take a girl in as he took me!"

Her voice dropped—indeed, Meg had had some difficulty in catching the last words. She lay still for a minute or two, picking the blanket with her fingers; then she went on, but still in a low tone—

"It *was* a shame, and I might have brought it home to him, after all; but where was the good, when I didn't know where to find him? But, Meg, your mother was a married woman—that's why I've always held my head up high, as a woman's a right to that's been before the parson, and

got her wedding lines all right. You'll find all about them, Meg, in the old chaney teapot—the one that was my grandmother's. Good night, girl—I'm drowsy-like —good night!"

Her mother said no more; but presently Meg felt her hand stiffening in her grasp, and before long knew the meaning of that quietness. She was alone in the world at last!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SISTERHOOD OF ST. PAUL'S.

IT must not be supposed that all Mr. Marsh's congregation were as ready as the ladies to enter into his views of the right position of the Church. Men were apt to be obstinate and stiff-necked in these matters, and the weaker sex was always the readiest to be influenced for good, and the most unquestioning in its obedience. Mr. Marsh had had some trouble, and anticipated more, from the male members of his flock; but the ladies were exerting themselves to the utmost to lessen his difficulties for him.

The most important personage on Sum-

merly Common, if not the richest, was Mr. Orley. His house—cottage, he called it, with a proud humility—was the very essence of neatness and trim order. His grounds were well kept by the best gardener in the place, and his conservatory was always dazzling in its display. He had lived on Summerly Common for five-and-twenty years, and was looked up to by every one, at his own end of the village at least, with all the reverence that his portly person and imposing bearing seemed to claim. He had a bland manner, which was almost regal in its graciousness; he might be thought too patronizing by some, who would see spots in the sun, flaws in the Koh-i-noor, but in the opinion of the majority who dwelt on Summerly Common, his manners were nearly faultless. He was tall, stout—but no stouter than a gentleman of good income and position, who dined well

daily, might be—had been very handsome in his youth, and now, though over fifty, was better worth looking at than many a younger man. He was rather florid, and inclining to be grey; but the greyness became him—it had the effect of powder, and completed the aristocratic bearing which everyone in Summerly—himself not excepted—admired so much in Mr. Orley. He looked every inch a lord, some people said—a great deal more like a lord than the Earl of Sandown, at Milford Chase, four miles from Summerly Common, who went about his grounds in a wide-awake, knickerbockers, high-lows, and gaiters; joked with the butchers and farmers when he gave the prizes at the Milford Cattle-show; and knew every labourer he employed by name. Mr. Orley would almost as soon have cut off his head as put a wide-awake on it; and as to knickerbockers, not a tailor in the

world would have dared propose them to him. He was irreproachable in his costume, without a tinge of dandyism, studying in that, as he did in everything else, the *juste milieu* which he held to be the chief characteristic of a gentleman. He was moderate in his politics—a liberal Whig; moderate in his tastes, liking a little pleasure now and then, when business—he was a wholesale druggist—permitted it; and taking that pleasure as a gentleman should at the Opera or the Horticultural; and he was moderate in his religion, or would have liked to have been so, if his wife would only let him.

Of course, he had always belonged to the Church. It was the most suitable religion for a gentleman; but he was very tolerant of Dissenters—had been known to lend his *Times*, which he considered the only paper fit for a gentleman's reading, to a neighbour

who went to chapel; asked after the neighbour's wife in her confinement; and bowed to the Dissenting minister whenever he met him. But he stood by the Church for all this laxity, attended the morning service every Sunday, uttered the responses aloud—this was before they had commenced intoning them—kept his eye on the National School boys in the gallery, and asked the Curate to dinner at least once a month. He had been elected churchwarden recently, and was considered a very efficient one; always gave liberally to collections, and supported the parish clergy on every occasion when his support could be of service. Altogether, until Mr. Marsh's advent in the place, Mr. Orley had looked upon himself, and been regarded by others, as one of the firmest pillars of the Established Church. But Mr. Marsh's opinion of what the Church consisted, and Mr. Orley's, were rather at va-

riance; and the Curate and the Churchwarden might have come to an open rupture, had it not been for the influence of the wife of the latter, who had been one of the earliest converts to Mr. Marsh's views when he first propounded them in Summerly.

How some men marry some women must always be a standing mystery—how Mr. Orley could ever have selected his wife was a marvel to many. There was a genial kindliness, a heartiness of tone in the man that won upon most people after a very short acquaintance. But Mrs. Orley was as frigid as an icicle, stiff, cold, and unbending—a woman whom you might know a dozen years without once seeing her smile. Careful in her dress—much too careful for a lady—it was the neatness of a schoolteacher, required to set a good example to the girls; so orderly and precise in her

movements, that they seemed regulated by clock-work; and plain and unattractive in her person. What could Mr. Orley have seen in her five-and-twenty years ago to induce him to make her his wife? Five-and-twenty years ago, when he must have been one of the handsomest young men in England! There have been plainer women than Mrs. Orley, but rarely more unlovely ones. It was a cold, grey face, without light or bloom—a face that you could never fancy a husband caressing, or a child's lips kissing. You would be right in the latter supposition—Mrs. Orley was childless—fortunately for the next generation—the children might not have favoured their father. But she ruled her husband, in spite of all her plainness. It might be that she had brought him his share in the druggist business, where he was now nominally chief partner, but in which Mrs. Orley had never

given up her interest. It might be that Mr. Orley was a man who, under almost any circumstances, would have spoiled the woman he married, partly out of the courtesy and forbearance that he considered due to every lady from a gentleman, and partly out of sheer instinctive kindness. However that might be, at Summerly Cottage the "grey mare was the better horse," most people said; and when you looked at Mrs. Orley's colourless tones, and meagre outlines, you felt that the mare was a very grey one indeed, and quite unfit to rule it over the nobler animal.

Mrs. Orley had taken to Ritualism very readily. It was an agreeable change in the monotony of her life. There was something, too, in its exclusiveness that suited her. It was pleasant to feel herself one of the Church, out of whose pale there was no salvation. It gave her much the same feeling that one

has indoors of a rainy day, when one sees the drenched pedestrians passing by on the wet, sloppy pavement. It is decidedly uncomfortable for them, but quite the reverse for us. The wetter and more miserable they look, the more we enjoy our own warmth and dryness. It's a bad thing for them to be out, but how very nice for us to be in! Mrs. Orley seemed, like some very good people, to think that heaven would be better worth the trying for if there was no chance of its being inconveniently crowded. She would have liked to have had a measure for Christ's love, and meted out God's mercy. There was the making of a first-rate Calvinist in her, only Calvinism had never come in her way. Ritualism, with its dogma of one infallible church, had all the exclusiveness of the Genevese creed, with a pomp, a show, and a display that made its services a welcome change to the dry mo-

notony of her life. They were even better than the theatre; for she was an actress in, as well as a spectator of them, and there was a grim self-satisfaction, a consciousness of doing something good for her own soul, and showing other people what they ought to do for theirs, that the theatre, of course, could never be expected to yield.

Mr. Marsh was a very frequent visitor at Summerly Cottage, and Mrs. Orley and he had long consultations together as to the best means of re-establishing the Anglo-Catholic Church in Summerly. The reverend gentleman was anxious to found a Sisterhood of Mercy in the village; not a Beguinage or a nunnery—the times were not ripe enough yet for that, nor could funds for some time to come be spared from the decorations and alterations of the church—but a sisterhood, that should include every lady in the village with time enough to devote to it.

They might, though living in their own homes, have their regular organization, their course of action prescribed, their modes of work; even have some distinctive name—the Sisters of St. Paul would not sound amiss, he thought. Mrs. Orley suggested the Sisters of St. David—why should they not be called after the name saint of their founder? But Mr. Marsh, though flattered at the idea, refused to entertain it. It might give a handle to the scoffers without to accuse him of spiritual pride and self-sufficiency. The time might come when a sisterhood might be so named—possibly when he had passed from this mundane scene—but for the present let the honour be St. Paul's.

But the sisterhood would be a good thing, there was no question of that; as Mr. Marsh said, it was sufficient for the priest to offer up the daily sacrifices—the services of the temple required all his time,

without the minor duties being required of him; that band of ladies, acting under his directions, and organized into a body, could perform as well, or better than himself. There ought to be some distinctive badge about it. Mrs. Orley suggested a dress to be worn by the members while performing their ministrations; but Mr. Marsh was not quite sure how that might be. The question was whether the Roman Catholic Church, which the Anglo-Catholic was now taking as its great exemplar, sanctioned the wearing a peculiar garb by a lay sisterhood not dwelling together, and only meeting occasionally. Mrs. Orley said that if it did not it ought —it ruined good dresses to be wearing them in all weathers, and some parts of Summerly were very muddy walking, and it was a chance if, in half the cottages, you found a seat clean enough to sit down upon—there was always washing, or cooking, or children

in the way. A dress stout, useful, and appropriate, would be a great feature in the sisterhood, and have a very salutary effect upon the minds of the Summerly labourers and their families.

Mr. Marsh was inclined to sanction the dress; it would be effective, as Mrs. Orley said—as to the economical part of the matter, he did not enter into that view of it quite so much as the lady. And he had his doubts whether such a dress as Mrs. Orley was likely to suggest would be just the one that the younger ladies of the congregation would approve of. That lady's own attire was too severe in its colours, too rigid in its avoidance of everything bright and fanciful, for her to be likely to originate a very attractive costume for the sisterhood. And then he was afraid to swerve from the rules which the Roman Church had laid down on such matters; therefore he suggested that,

before deciding on the matter of costume, it would be well for him to consult one likely to be better informed than himself on such matters. Why should he hesitate to go to the fountain-head for help? Father Vivian, a priest, who officiated at Milford and several of the neighbouring towns, sharing his pastoral cares among them, travelling from one to the other on Sundays, to perform mass, had lately taken up his residence in the lower part of Summerly. Why not consult him?—his advice as to the dress, and many minor matters, would be of great assistance. Perhaps the Father might even be brought to countenance a meeting of the ladies with his presence; and, at that meeting, if he approved of a distinctive costume, it might then be settled of what it should consist.

Mrs. Orley said in that case she would invite a number of the ladies to her house

early the next week. As it was settled that the sisterhood was to be, whether it should be attired in every-day clothes or not, the sooner it was started the better. Would Mr. Marsh call on Father Vivian, meanwhile, with the view of obtaining his assistance in the matter? And would he at once assist her in drawing up a list of the ladies whom he intended to honour by allowing them to co-operate in his ministrations?

Mr. Marsh wisely replied that he left that part of the matter to Mrs. Orley's own discretion. She would know best what ladies were most likely to be useful in the good work. He would only mention one name, and if that appeared on the roll of the sisterhood, its influence would be immense; Miss Stanton, of the Oaks. Would it be possible to induce her to co-operate with them?

Mrs. Orley felt dubious on this point. Mr. Stanton was supposed to be Low Church—at least he always attended the parish church; and his daughter was likely to hold opinions similar to his own—or if not, he would be scarcely likely to allow her to co-operate in a scheme that the Rector in his lamentable ignorance would be sure not to see the advantages of. However, Mrs. Winthrop, Miss Stanton's chaperon, was her own first cousin. She had always found her very ready to receive instruction in religious matters from those qualified to give it. She would write to her, and though her duties at the Oaks might prevent her joining the sisterhood, she would possibly attend the first meeting, and might be brought to see that it was her bounden duty to urge her charge to become one of its members, let her father's opinions and the Rector's be what they might.

"Obedience to parents is very desirable, but Miss Stanton is quite old enough to judge for herself; and on such a point as this, Mr. Marsh, I think we are justified in saying that the authority of the Church ought to supersede even that of a father."

Mr. Marsh would not contradict the lady. It would be a very good thing indeed if Miss Stanton joined the sisterhood—thus enrolling herself at once as a convert to his teaching; and he was not at all afraid of any open scandal through her disobeying her father. Parents with only daughters, heiresses and beauties to boot, were, generally speaking, very manageable; there was not much fear but that if Mrs. Winthrop did her duty in the matter, by showing Miss Stanton in what hers consisted, she would find no great difficulty in persuading her father to let her follow that duty, and become a lay sister of the order of St. Paul's.

He left Mrs. Orley, telling her he would at once proceed to call on Father Vivian; and she sat down to write to Mrs. Winthrop.

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